Ethnography Otherwise: Interventions in Writing, Photography, and Sound in Mexico and Brazil

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation takes up the question of what it means to read and practice ethnography otherwise. I study works by Gertrude Duby Blom, Fernando Benítez, and Héctor García of Mexico, as well as Mário de Andrade and Darcy Ribeiro of Brazil, to develop otherwise as both a way of thinking about experimental ethnographic practices and a prompt for re-reading materials produced in an ethnographic mode. Expanding on the idea that ethnographic works are ‘made, not found,’ the chapters draw attention to ways that ethnographies inscribe traces of the multiple parties that participate in their production, while examining a series of twentieth-century ethnographic experiments by figures on the fringes of formal anthropology—an amateur photographer who takes tens of thousands of photographs in Lacandon indigenous communities in Chiapas (Blom); a Brazilian modernista writer and musicologist who approaches fieldwork as a listening practice and positions himself as an apprentice to his informants (Andrade); an ethnologist turned novelist who stages his novel like an unruly ethnographic archive (Ribeiro); and a journalist who sets out to study and document indigenous lifeways in Mexico on an almost epic scale (Benítez).

If critical ethnography scholarship has theorized the inherent ambivalence of ethnographic materials often in terms of a crisis of ethnographic authority and textualization—that is, as a problem of graphing cultures into written texts—then the readings here grapple with the intentionality of ethnographic materials themselves alongside the stories of the people who produce them. These case studies suggest that re-thinking the photographs, recordings, writings, and archives that are made ethnographic involves complicating the ethnographer’s position of privilege and noticing what resists or escapes her intentions. Yet they also problematize a way of reading that can reinscribe that position of privilege, a reading practice in which the ethnographer becomes the focal point of ethnographic encounters and the party principally responsible for the making and re-making of ethnographic materials. The chapters that follow bring out a series of ethno-modalities—modes of ethnographic inscription and creation—that move across photography, writing, and audio-recording to consider the messiness of fieldwork, the excess of ethnographic records and archives, and the unpredictability and unruliness of ethnographic objects in terms of what they inscribe and produce.
For my Nana,
who taught me how to pay attention.

And for Marco and Cecilia.
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When a group of indigenous families first moved onto the now-contested grounds of the *Museu do Índio* in the Maracanã neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro in 2006, no one seemed to pay them much mind. The abandoned building had been boarded up since 1978, when the museum founded on the mantra “um museu contra o preconceito” (“a museum against stereotype”) moved across town to a larger, renovated site. The move left the original location with a new name—the *Antigo Museu do Índio*, the *Old or Antique Museum of the Indian*, as it would be labeled on city maps of Rio—but little else. The ‘Old’ museum had been home to descendants of Brazil’s last emperor, Pedro II; birthplace of the federal agency *Serviço de Proteção aos Índios*; and site of the first ethnographic museum dedicated to Brazil’s indigenous peoples. Yet now, exhibits and archives were emptied out, and the parcel of land once donated by the emperor’s family to found a research center dedicated to Brazil’s indigenous cultures was left abandoned in the shadow of the nearby Maracanã soccer stadium. After sitting empty for nearly three decades, the *Antigo Museu do Índio* began to receive a steady trickle of new visitors. Around twenty people from various indigenous communities and ethnicities across Brazil began gathering there and putting to use the crumbling nineteenth-century building and surrounding lot. These residents provided lodging to indigenous individuals who were in the process of travelling through Rio’s urban center or moving there to look for work or study at the nearby university. They built rooms, many along an exterior wall of the deteriorating building, so that newly constructed bedrooms and living spaces shared walls with rooms that once housed museum collections and the offices of the *Serviço de Proteção aos Índios*. They grew food in swaths of land around the museum grounds, planted gardens of medicinal herbs, and performed ceremonies brought from their communities. Renaming the site *Aldeia Maracanã*—Maracanã Village—the residents ran electricity and added new paintings and art to the museum’s interior, overlapping and painting alongside the faded remnants of decorations and past exhibits that still marked some of the museum’s interior walls.

At once an abandoned museum, a remnant of empire, home to Brazil’s first federal agency for indigenous peoples, and a present-day *aldeia* community, the *Antigo Museu do Índio* has been the site of multiple recyclings that span over a century. Taken together, its many life cycles put at issue the central question of this dissertation—the question of what it means to practice and read ethnography otherwise. Critical analysis of ethnographic texts and materials has helped us understand the production of ethnography as “a crucial form of knowledge” marked by “radically asymmetrical relations of power” (*Partial 1, Imperial 5*). At the same time, it has grappled with the ways in which sites like the *Antigo Museu do Índio* get remade—ways that do not seem to fit within the histories of epistemic violence that we might tell about them. These sites neither erase the histories of power that mark them nor remain bound by them; like the palimpsest of the *Antigo Museu*’s walls, they acquire new layers of inscriptions while never quite masking the ones beneath. This dissertation poses an inquiry into a set of materials whose stories, not unlike the story of the *Antigo Museu*, intersect with

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1 See James Clifford’s “Introduction: Partial Truths,” which opens *Writing Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, and Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. 
those of imperial and colonial pasts, with research and policy institutions, and with people in and outside the discipline of anthropology who engage in ethnographic practice—in studying and producing knowledge about the collective identities that we call cultures, whether through photographing, audio-recording, or collecting, as well as writing ethnographic accounts. If cases like the Antigo Museu do Índio-Aldeia Maracanã invite us to think about the multiple histories and modes of producing cultural knowledge that converge and interact in spaces like an ethnographic museum, then the readings here point to the significance of revisiting those spaces and materials to trace the stories of subjects who make and re-make ethnography otherwise.

The essays gathered here develop otherwise not so much to mean ‘other than,’ but more to mean ‘differently’ or ‘in another way or manner’—more as adverb than adjective. That is, I take it up as a term to describe an engaged and ongoing process—an activity or process of becoming rather than a state or identity of being ‘other.’ Thinking ethnography otherwise, I suggest, involves staying attuned to the processes and practices that shape how ethnographic materials and spaces are produced—the subjects, technologies, interactions, and presences that participate in their making—as well as how they function as sites of problematization and invention, sites that point us back to the ways that ethnography gets made and re-made ‘differently,’ ‘by other means,’ and ‘in different circumstances,’ as otherwise in its adverbial form can mean. In this sense, I propose otherwise to describe the inventions and interventions of subjects engaged in making and re-making ethnography differently, as well as to describe a reading practice—a practice aimed at contemplating the otherwise within ethnographic materials themselves, drawing out the interventions they stage.

The still-unfolding story of the Aldeia Maracanã brings attention to this kind of otherwise, especially as residents complicate our ability to read the Antigo Museu do Índio and Serviço de Proteção ao Índio as sites where ethnographers, officials, and researchers control the gathering, production, and curation of ethnographic knowledge. Aldeia residents were all but ignored until Brazil won bids to host the 2014 Copa do Mundo (World Cup) and the 2016 Summer Olympics, at which point the Antigo Museu site became a point of contention and residents grew increasingly vocal in the press (and the chambers of Rio’s municipal and state governments) about their claim to the site. As Rio’s state government began scooping properties and sketching up renovation plans for the famous Maracanã stadium that borders the Antigo Museu property’s southern edge with clear intent to demolish the Museu, Aldeia residents talked about their dispute less as a contest over property than a contest over history. What state officials were labeling an occupation of ‘invaders’ and haphazard band of squatters, Aldeia residents talked about as an autonomous indigenous community that embodied a critical legacy.2

Through the stories that these residents have been telling about how they came to live in the Aldeia and why they stay, they also go about constructing a shared narrative around the deteriorated Museu structure. They frequently make reference to the building’s intersecting histories as museum, research center, and home to the SPI, noting the site’s significance as a place for gathering indigenous knowledge and material culture, as well as a sending-off point

2 The term “invasores”—invaders—became particularly critical after it was used to describe Aldeia residents in an official statement released by governor Sérgio Cabral’s office demanding that residents abandon the 1862 building and museum grounds. The statement, which was delivered to Aldeia residents by a public defender, warned residents that “O governo está tomando as devidas providências para que o local seja desocupado dos seus invasores.” See “Rio decide tombar Museu do Índio, mas destino de indígenas é incerto” BBC Brasil 28 January 2013.
for early anthropological expeditions funded by the Brazilian state and led by the SPI. “Foi o primeiro Museu do Índio no Brasil e na América Latina também . . . muitos indígenas já passaram por aqui e deixaram sua história,” (“It was the first Museum of the Indian in Brazil and also in Latin America . . . many indigenous people have passed through here and left their history,”) a resident named Marcia says, portraying the site as traced with multiple histories. The Museu’s role in both educating the public about the country’s indigenous cultures and designating a space for collecting indigenous knowledge also emerges when residents talk about their choice to inhabit the site and defend it, despite repeated attempts by police to evict them by force. “Este é o prédio que abriga a história,” (“This is the site that shelters history,”) says Carlos Tukano, invoking what he calls residents’ “direito de índio” (“right of the Indian”) and insisting “Nós não somos invasores,” (“We are not invaders”). While talking about his hopes to revitalize the museum as a center for research on indigenous cultures, Xamakiri Afonso Aporinã describes inhabiting the abandoned museum as a commemorative act and a step toward reimagining the museum space and its role in shaping the way indigenous cultures in Brazil are studied, remembered, and represented: “Queremos uma cultura viva, e não um museu morto” (“We want a living culture, not a dead museum”).

The Aldeia story prompts us to observe how the ethnographic museum and research institution gets remade and recycled, bringing out complex processes of contestation and reimagining that run side-by-side. Yet, it also asks us to revisit some of the assumptions we might make about the museum itself. If we can think about the Aldeia residents as filling the museum building and grounds with ways of thinking and using the Antigo Museu otherwise, then the narratives that residents are telling about the Aldeia suggest that we need to rethink the Museu itself ‘in another way or ways,’ outside of the stories that the state or formal anthropology might tell. Carlos Tukano’s cry that Aldeia residents are not “invasores,” but rightful inhabitants of a site that “abriga a história” — that ‘shelters’ or ‘houses history’ in the mode of a dwelling place — serves as but one example that points to the multiple histories that converge in the Museu site. Much like the contact zones Mary Louise Pratt describes, the Museu do Índio functions like a space of encounter — where “trajectories. . . intersect,” one shaped by “co-presence, interaction, [and] interlocking understandings and practices . . .” (Imperial 7).

A photograph housed in the archive at the Museu do Índio’s new location — the site of recent protest demonstrations by Aldeia residents and activists against the demolition of the Antigo Museu — crystallizes this problem. The image sits tucked into an album of black-and-white photographs taken in the Antigo museum building, presumably around the time of its grand opening in 1953. In it, we see a circle of indigenous men pictured in the process of performing a dance for a small audience in one of the museum’s original exhibition halls. The camera captures them in the process of bowing their heads and clasping hands, while in the background, we can make out the faces of people watching and catch glimpses of an exhibit mounted on the wall. Are the performers part of an ethnographic display or cultural spectacle — objects of ethnography among others? According to whom? How does the

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4 See the article by Íris Marini “Nós não existimos para ele,’ disse cacique, após Cabral anunciar museu de COB” Jornal do Brasil 20 February 2013.
photograph work like a document of the many kinds of co-presence and relations of power enacted in this scene?

And further, what do we mean by ethnographic—a word whose etymology combines graph—writing—with ethnos—people or culture—but whose usage also implies ways of seeing, listening, collecting, and inscribing knowledge about culture? Much like the materials discussed in the chapters that follow, the single image figures the ethnographic designation that we might give the scene like an encounter and complicated interplay of gazes and presences. Here, the performance is framed within the context of a museum and research center designated for the study of indigenous cultures. Here, there are people looking and observing, and a camera that inflects the scene with a look of its own; the unnamed photographer uses the device to record the crowd’s inquisitive gazes, glimpses of the museum exhibit, and the performers’ bodies all in the same image, framing the dancing subjects in a way that resonates with Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s discussion of ‘objects of ethnography.’ A bowl, a dance performance, a musical instrument, a wedding or funeral ceremony—none of these are inherently ethnographic, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, but they become so via processes of fragmentation, framing, and inscription that convert and code them as such. Writing about the fragments and excerpts of culture that ethnography takes up as its object, she writes that, “Ethnographic artifacts are objects of ethnography. They are artifacts created by ethnographers. Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached and carried away by ethnographers. Such objects are ethnographic not because they were found in a Hungarian peasant household, Kwakiutl village, or Rajasthani market. . . but by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached…” (17-18).

Photographed within the Museu do Índio and surrounded on all sides with clues that they are being ethnographically marked, the dancing subjects in the image that I find in the archive are no doubt detached in numerous ways—the wall of exhibits in the background participates in shaping their performance as ethnographic object, as does the line of spectators who have gathered to observe a cultural performance. In the image, many sets of eyes are on the performers, and the contrast between their costumes and those of the people in the audience suggests that they have been brought there to be looked at as ethnographic, as teaching or demonstrating something about their culture. At the same time, the process of “radical detachment” and becoming ethnographic that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes seems to fall short to describe the complex, co-present processes and practices that intersect in the museum hall and the photograph (25). If a space is, as Michel de Certeau suggests, “a practiced place,” then the photograph seems to record a meeting of spatial practices (Practice 117). The space of the ethnographic museum might be practiced as a pedagogical space or space of inquiry, display, or cultural encounter by some of the subjects pictured in the photograph, but the image prompts me to ask: How do the men’s bodies and performances figure at once within and without, inside and outside the museum space and the ethnographic designation we might give them; that is, how do they evoke and perform multiple possibilities and practices within an ‘ethnographic’ context and event?

If Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s insight that the objects of ethnography are “made, not found” guides many of the readings in the chapters here, my readings also look to trace the multiple subjects and practices that participate in their making (3). The process Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes helps bring into sharp focus the role that ethnographers play

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6 See also James Clifford’s work on anthropological fieldwork and spatial practices in Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century.
when they observe and study, collect and categorize, document and inscribe material objects
and cultural practices as telling us something important about ‘cultures’. If ethnographic
objects are *made*, —a quality that James Clifford and others bring out in their analysis of
ethnographic writing—then ethnography’s ‘truth effect’ is immediately complicated. This
critical intervention has sparked a significant body of scholarship in itself that often informs
the readings here and one that highlights forms of authority and the politics of knowledge
built into ethnographic production. But privileging the ethnographer in what I have been
calling the making and re-making of ethnography also threatens to foreclose on the “co-
presence, interaction, [and] interlocking understandings and practices,” to return to Pratt,
involved in producing the materials that get taken up and produced as ethnographic (*Imperial
7*). The ethnographer’s role or the ethnographic frame in many cases may appear the most
prominent or defining, but, as the *Antigo Museu-Aldeia Maracanã* puts at issue, it hardly works
alone. In the photograph of the dancers performing in the museum halls, for example, it
proves difficult to read the performers’ sense of the event; their backs are to us and their heads
bowed low, so that their faces are not visible and their bodies appear absorbed in the
movements. It proves equally difficult to draw out more of the image’s story. I consult the
*Museu* librarians, search the archive for information, but no one can date the photograph or
tell me more. I cannot confirm even basic information about the image—the performers’
names, their tribal affiliation, who invited them, the kind of performance or ceremony
pictured, or the composition of the audience. But the photograph nonetheless prompts me to
think about a museum space and performative event that are laced with traces of making,
irreducible to the ‘ethnographic’ designation we might give it. To read the photograph as a
document of ‘live display’ that registers the dancing subjects and performance as mere ‘objects
of ethnography’ seems to foreclose on their presence and participation in the event—to
foreclose on the performers’ inscriptions within the “certificate of presence” that is the
photograph, to think about Roland Barthes’ seminal discussion of photography.* What does
this image suggest about Xamakiri Afonso Aporinã’s call for a “cultura viva” over a “museu
morto”? Like the quotes circulating from residents of the *Aldeia Maracanã*, the photograph
prompts me to ask: was this ever a “museu morto” at all?

Exploring a set of case studies that similarly converge in questions of how to read and
practice ethnography otherwise, the chapters that follow develop ethnography otherwise in a
double sense. They take up materials—photographs, texts, audio recordings—that become

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7 See “Partial Truths” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*.
8 See the introduction to *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary*—a recently published dialogue between
Paul Rabinow and George E. Marcus—for an extended reflection on the radical critique of ethnographies as
texts associated with the *Writing Cultures* movement of the 1980s. As a far-reaching project of “epistemological
critique,” the movement participates in what is often described as a critical or self-reflexive turn in anthropology,
while also highlighting the forms of authority built into the study and representation of cultures, and bringing
critical literary theory to bear in reading ethnographic texts (Rabinow & Marcus 30). See generally the essays
collected in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus,
as well as the work of important interlocutors including Clifford (on the crisis of ethnographic authority);
Johannes Fabian (on problems of temporal privilege in anthropology); Renato Rosaldo (on the fieldworker as
inquisitor and ethnographies as tainted with ‘imperialist nostalgia’); Edward Said (on ties between anthropology
and colonialism); George E. Marcus (on fieldwork as mise-en-scene); Mary Louise Pratt (on travel writing,
ethnography, and imperialism); and Clifford Geertz (on ‘the anthropologist as author’ and ethnographies as
texts). On anthropology’s self-reflexive turn, see also *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology*,
edited by Jay Ruby.
9 See his *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. 

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‘ethnographic,’ while reading them as holding meanings and potentialities that the ethnographer and ethnographic process does not—indeed cannot—determine or control. In this light, I emphasize the slippage or ambivalence within the materials themselves, thinking both in terms of the materials as documents of “co-presence” (Pratt) and “co-evalness” (Fabian), but also their “excess” (Poole), “uncontrollable” meanings (Clifford), “micro-intensions,” and “density” (Edwards). At the same time that I draw attention to the otherwise within ethnographic materials, I give sustained attention to works by a cluster of figures from Brazil and Mexico—only one of them a formally trained anthropologist—which coalesce around questions of how to practice ethnography otherwise. The chapters closely read materials that, not unlike the Antigo Museu or the photograph discussed above, are ideal for thinking about the ways that ethnographic objects hold or evoke traces and multiplicities of meanings. But they also pair this reading practice with studies of people who take up ethnography in an experimental way. Focusing on twentieth-century Mexico and Brazil, I follow stories of figures who experiment with alternative ethnographic practices on the fringes of formal anthropology—an amateur photographer, a modernista writer and musicologist, a fieldworker turned novelist, and a journalist who sets out to study and document indigenous lifeways in Mexico on an almost epic scale.

As they experiment with the ethnographic mode through a variety of media and technologies—the camera, the novel, the tape-recorder, the written fieldwork account—these figures bring ethnography’s histories of epistemic violence into critical view, while also exploring ethnography’s potential to complicate, counter, or intervene in colonial and imperial histories. Darcy Ribeiro and Fernando Benítez position their own ethnographic practice to problematize the work of missionaries and friars who undertook massive projects to document the lifeways of Amerindian indigenous peoples—lifeways that they were simultaneously recording and working to eradicate. Darcy peoples his novel Maíra with friars, linguists, and even SPI representatives who participate in a process similar to what José Rabasa writes about as ethnosuicide—a process by which native informants are asked to sacrifice themselves by way of relinquishing their culture to the ethnographer’s record. At the same time, Ribeiro builds his novel out of fragments that he collected during his own fieldwork and stages his text like an unruly archive laced with voices and narratives that evade the control of the people who gather them together. Fernando Benítez highlights the ethnographic work that Catholic missionaries and foreign explorers like Carl Lumholtz conducted among indigenous groups in Mexico, worrying that indigenous knowledge in Mexico has been approached like a kind of export product and wondering whether his own ethnographic practice can escape reproducing a form of banditry. While conducting fieldwork in indigenous communities across Mexico and amassing audio-recordings of oral histories, songs, and shamanic chants,


11 Rabasa develops the term ethnosuicide in Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You: Elsewheres and Ethnosuicide in the Colonial Mesoamerican World.

12 Benítez is also sharply critical of the work of his contemporary Oscar Lewis, a U.S. anthropologist who carries out participant observation with families in Mexico City while researching what Lewis terms the ‘culture of poverty.’ Lewis tours inner Mexico City and tape-records informants’ voices in order to later transcribe them into his texts.
he troubles over the violence that he asks his informants to inflict upon themselves and their cultures by asking them to relay their ‘secretos’ to him and allow them to be captured by his audiotapes and modes of documentation.

In the chapters that follow, these kinds of critical views into ethnography’s pasts and its presents often intertwine with projects that test an experimental ethnographic praxis. Gertrude Duby Blom did not discuss her approach to photography much at all, but many of her images problematize a larger theme in her work about ethnography’s potential to document presence where absence has been assumed—to use ethnography to help fill in some of official historiography’s blanks. Her portraits of women who fought in the Mexican Revolution and the images that she takes in indigenous communities across southern Mexico probe photography’s potential to offer a corrective to history: Just because a group of people goes unmentioned in the historical record of the “relatos del tiempo de la Conquista... no quiere decir que no la hubiera,” she writes about the Lacandon communities in Chiapas where she takes tens of thousands of photographs (“it hardly means that they did not exist”). If Blom suggests the importance of recognizing groups written out of history and mobilizes ethnographic study to that effect, Fernando Benítez and Héctor García’s study of the Cora Semana Santa festival in Nayarit suggests an investment in using ethnographic documentation to offer a corrective to what the historical record has misrepresented. Posing their work to counter histories of the Spanish “conquista espiritual” (“spiritual conquest”), their study of the Cora’s Holy Week festival employs a host of mimetic media (writing, audio-recording, film, and photography) and figures ethnography as a means to mark a ‘conquered’ culture’s adaptation and survival. In a markedly different case discussed here, Mário de Andrade explores ethnographic study as providing a powerful self-corrective for the metropolitan intellectual and ethnographer-musicologist. He describes his time collecting regional ballads in the Brazilian Northeast as bringing his sense of expertise into crisis in a way that challenges him to listen and to record differently, as well as to fashion himself as an apprentice to his informants. In his travelogue O turista aprendiz, the intervention that ethnographic practice can make is acutely ethical—one that probes the relationship between the researcher and his informants.

While these experiments pose different questions about an ethnographic practice capable of intervening in questions of history, ethics, and the politics of knowledge, the recordings, photographs, and writings that these figures produce in some way find themselves within tensions surrounding mimetic devices and cultural salvage. In some cases, they take up ethnography as a mode of knowledge production while drawing attention to its inherent slippage, problematizing questions of representation and knowability, as Mário de Andrade does when he writes about his “viagem etnográfica” (“ethnographic journey”), or showing how the ethnographic collection process inscribes an excess of traces that exceed the ethnographer’s control, like Darcy Ribeiro in Matra. Whether they explicitly highlight this problem or not, each of the practitioners discussed here takes up a mimetic device in order to secure some record of what he or she collects or creates in the field: Mário de Andrade feverishly records popular songs in writing and musical notation. Gertrude Blom photographs indigenous subjects thought to be “heirs of the ancient Maya,” and Héctor García uses the camera to document a weeklong Cora pageant. 13 Fernando Benítez tape-recorders shamanic songs and oral histories that he then transcribes and prints in his text, and

13 I take the phrase from Christine Price’s Heirs of the Ancient Maya: A Portrait of the Lacandon Indians, which comes illustrated with photographs taken by Blom.
Darcy Ribeiro re-collects in his novel the indigenous cosmology narratives that he first records during fieldwork. Posing questions about recording, documenting, indexing, and storing, these projects align ethnography’s potential for intervention in part with an emphasis on producing copies of cultural practices that might otherwise be overlooked or lost. In this way, the ethnographic projects discussed in these chapters overlap in different ways with what James Clifford describes as perhaps the most far-reaching anthropological paradigm of the twentieth-century—the salvage paradigm, which figures ethnographers as salvaging remnants of ‘vanishing’ cultures that might otherwise be lost or destroyed in modernity’s wake. While salvage as a paradigm or problematic runs through the materials studied here, I suggest that the photographs, texts, and recordings themselves can also be read as undercutting the ‘redemptive’ role of the ethnographer, complicating the assumptions of temporal and cultural privilege that the salvage paradigm implies.

We can trace how salvage held significant pull on how ethnography was practiced within the two milieu that I explore. The Mexican Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH), for example, enlist an army of ethnographers to study indigenous languages and cultures worried to be dying out, while their archeological counterpart, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) fills the massive Museo de Antropología in Mexico City with artifacts. Mário de Andrade himself was an avid collector, and Manuel Gamio and Gilberto Freyre, two influential anthropologists in Mexico and Brazil respectively, were trained by Franz Boas, whose emphasis on amassing materials from endangered cultures and producing mimetic records of their practices brought him the charge of encouraging an ethnography of ‘empirical overkill.’ As I develop further in chapter one while reading a series of Gertrude Blom’s photographs, however, the work of ethnographic salvage comes imbued with assumptions about time and the ethnographer’s ability to rescue, but it carries within it a central paradox: in the act of trying to record or index a cultural practice feared to be ‘vanishing,’ the ethnographer comes up against its very presence and relies on subjects to document it. In this sense, as much as salvage works under the guises of a teleological history that would place the culture of study within a ‘lost’—or nearly lost—time, that same work brings out what Johannes Fabian termed “co-evalness”—that is, shared time—and produces materials that document co-presence.

While shaped by salvage ethnography, the works I study thus open different avenues for problematizing the paradigm. Salvage, in the case of a novel like Ribeiro’s Maíra, involves not only thinking about a tenuous meeting of rescue and reuse, but also the unruliness of the narratives, the documents, the objects that the ethnographer ‘saves.’ In Benítez’ account of his fieldwork with a Cora community in Nayarit, México, we find the ethnographer’s anxieties to record what he fears will soon die out—the religious chants and performances of Cora shamans—positioned against his own documentation of a Holy Week festival that he

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14 See his essay “The Others: Beyond the ‘Salvage’ Paradigm” discussed further in chapter one.
15 See Johannes Fabian’s Ethnography as Commentary, for one such reference to Boas’ practice. Amy Fass Emery has emphasized Boas’ importance in shaping what she terms generally the ‘anthropological imagination in Latin American literature.’ Her study, which focuses exclusively on novels, credits Boas for providing a guiding example for Latin American anthropologists like José María Arguedas of Peru and sparking what she sees as a burgeoning interest in folklore across Latin America. See The Anthropological Imagination in Latin American Literature. Studies like Rick López’ Crafting México or Mário de Souza Chagas’ A Imaginação Museal (on museums in Brazil), in contrast, read the emphasis on collecting and folklore in Mexico and Brazil respectively in terms of national memory more than imported models. On Manuel Gamio, see López and Analisa Taylor. On Gilberto Freyre as collector, see Chagas.
considers a testament to the Cora’s ability to outlive the Spanish ‘conquista espiritual.’ The dissertation thus ends with an ethnography produced at the limits of salvage and survival: the culture for which Benítez expresses explicit “nostalgia” appears in his written account of the festival, as well as the accompanying photographs by Héctor García, as a culture that is living, adapting, and surviving.

While I suggest that the various case studies collected here converge in a set of concerns about the limits and possibilities of ethnographic modes of inscription, all the figures whose experiments get taken up in these chapters hover on the boundaries of the movements and institutions usually privileged in studies of ethnographic practices in these two milieu. Darcy Ribeiro is the only one to receive formal training as an ethnographer, but even his story and his novel Maíra complicate the standard narratives about institutions like the SPI and INI, as well as the museums, archives, and academic programs that were important in shaping how ethnography was being practiced in Brazil and Mexico. Fernando Benítez was close friends with Alfonso Caso, the architect of Mexico’s INI, and much of Benítez’ massive study Los indios de México would have been impossible without his connections with the federal agency, including translators, guides, researchers, and patrons. Gertrude Blom’s early writings about her research with Lacandon communities were published as INI pamphlets, and she sometimes photographed at schools and medical clinics run by the agency. She also supplied institutions like the Smithsonian and the Museo Nacional de Antropología with artifacts collected during her visits with indigenous communities across Chiapas — “pequeños. . . acompañantes” (“tiny companions”) she calls the objects that she carefully packs and prepares to send to museums while she researches in the field.16 Both Mário de Andrade and Darcy Ribeiro participated in shaping how ethnography figured into Brazilian universities and museums: Mário founds the ethnology program at the University at São Paulo with Dina Lévi-Strauss and directs the São Paulo Departamento de Cultura, where he amasses recordings of Brazilian folk music in the Discoteca Municipal. Darcy Ribeiro, co-founder of the Universidade de Brasília, is the first ethnologist hired by the SPI and the principal figure behind Rio de Janiero’s Museu do Índio — the very “museu contra o preconceito” whose history is the subject of current debate between Aldeia residents and politicians intent on demolishing the museum’s original site.17

But if the Antigo Museu’s story challenges the sense that these kinds of institutions—museums, federal agencies, universities and research establishments—ultimately determine the frame through which to read the ethnographic materials that they gathered and produced, the chapters here work against the assumption that the influence of these institutions precluded critical ethnographic work and experimental production. In her study of indígenismo in Mexico, for example, Analisa Taylor emphasizes that the INI “exercised a virtual monopoly on the field of social scientific production,” including ethnographic work—an observation similar to ones made by Alcida Ramos about Brazil’s SPI (18). The SPI was founded over forty years earlier and in a starkly different political climate than that of Mexico’s 1940 post-Revolutionary reforms, but it similarly gets credited with training generations of anthropologists in participant observation, organizing and funding research

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16 See La selva lacandona, a two-volume work that Blom co-writes with her archeologist husband Franz Blom about their expeditions in the region.
18 See Taylor’s Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination: Thresholds of Belonging.
expeditions, and overseeing the mass collection of objects, audio-recordings, and texts to fill national museums and archives. On the surface, this can make institutions like the INI appear “top-down, paternalist, [and] positivist,” as Estelle Tarica writes, thus occluding the complexities of the actual ethnographic work to come out of such institutions (xxiii). While readings of ethnographic production in Brazil and Mexico tend to emphasize its place within apparently strict structures of national anthropology, the figures that I discuss in this dissertation open up avenues for reading ethnographic practice as at times intersecting with but not wedded to discourses and institutions of the nation-state in ways that we might anticipate.

What joins the essays included in this study is therefore not a historical or national frame—I do not wish to map the Brazilian milieu onto the Mexican or vice versa. Instead, the chapters that follow work as a kind of montage surrounding the concern about ethnography otherwise—as a problem of ethics and encounter, as a problem of mode and technology, as a problem of drawing out multiplicities and co-presences and interactions where a regimented knowledge-producing practice can appear to be. Chapter one interrogates the salvage paradigm through reading images of Lacandon indigenous subjects taken by Gertrude Duby Blom (1901-1993), a photographer little known outside of Chiapas. Following a visual history beginning with photographs by nineteenth-century explorers and amateur anthropologists (Maler, Tozzer, Charnay) and continuing to Mexican modernist photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo, I suggest that ruins emerge as a trope for Mexican indigeneity that gets challenged in Blom’s lens. While a salvage approach likens indigenous cultures to architectural ruins, framing them as static, fragmented, and anachronistic, I look at a subset of Blom’s images that pairs Mayan ruins with Lacandon subjects directly, arguing that they present a sharply critical picture that challenges the assumptions of temporality, ethnographic authority, and impending loss that the ruin-Lacandon coupling might seem to suggest. I give special attention to the particular characteristics and histories of the photographic medium Blom works within—a medium that chemically ‘fixes’ (Batchen) imprints of bodies and objects and one whose reputation for unmediated realism, permanence, and indexicality led many anthropologists to promote photography as an ideal tool for recording threatened cultures before they were presumably lost. Contemplating the ways that Blom’s images intimate dynamism, co-presence, and cultural transmission and production (over rescue), I read the photographs themselves as gesturing toward an alternative to constructions of the Lacandon as ethnological ruins whose surviving pieces the ethno-photographer salvages and preserves.

My second chapter looks at an understudied text by Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), the musicologist and writer best known as author of the novel Macunaíma and ‘pope’ of Brazilian modernismo. I read Andrade’s unfinished, fragmentary travelogue O turista aprendiz as an attempt to articulate an ethnographic praxis that hinges on the term aprendiz —apprentice or novice. As Andrade photographs and writes about his extended journeys through the Amazons (1927) and the Brazilian northeast (1928) to research regional cultures and collect folklore, he probes the authority and history built into his position as traveler and ethnographer. I focus on moments that show Andrade in the process of negotiating the

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19 See the introduction to Estelle Tarica’s The Inner-Life of Mestizo Nationalism. On the SPI and its successor, the Fundação Nacional do Índio, see Alcida Ramos Indianismo: Ethnic Politics in Brazil, as well as Antônio Carlos Souza de Lima’s detailed study Um grande cerco de paz: poder tutelar, indigência e formação do Estado no Brasil.
tension between what he constructs as *etnógrafo-turista* and *etnógrafo-aprendiz*; while he recognizes how ethnographers exert a power to consume and constitute themselves as loci of knowledge, Andrade simultaneously looks to explore an alternative approach whereby he positions himself as a novice—an apprentice to his ethnographic subjects rather than a researcher who extracts and appropriates knowledge from informants. When Andrade chooses a walking stick (over a gun, cannon, or knife) as the emblem of his journeys, or describes a *coquiroyo* singer from the northeast teaching him to listen to regional melodies that, according to Western musical scales, are off-key, he fashions an approach to encountering and studying cultures that tries to move outside of the discourses of discovery, violence, and appropriation that he connects to traditional ethnographies and foreigners’ accounts of Brazil.

If Mário de Andrade’s travelogue situates his alternative ethnographic practice in terms of the ethics of encounter, the subject of my third chapter problematizes ethnographic collection and storage, that is, how (and within which structures) ethnographers store knowledge and constitute cultures as collections. I consider Brazilian Darcy Ribeiro’s (1922-1997) shift from anthropologist (in the British functionalist tradition) to novelist, reading his text *Maíra* (1976) as an exercise in counter-archive. Classification, identification, consignation (in Derrida’s sense of “gathering together signs”), interpretation, preservation—Ribeiro’s novel casts a critical eye on the very activities that creating archives involves and highlights how archives shape and structure—but cannot determine—meaning. In this sense, I read *Maíra*, a novel that recycles much of Ribeiro’s fieldwork with Amazonian indigenous groups like the Kadiwéu, as a rejection of the ethnographic monograph and a re-making of the anthropological archive. I suggest that the novel employs multivocality and an experimental mode of ethnographic assemblage that looks to account for processes of dialogue, contestation, and creation, staging the ethnographic archive like an excess.

The fourth and final chapter further develops questions about voice and presence by exploring the possibility of reading ethnographies as permeated or laced with citations. Reading a section of Fernando Benítez’ five-volume study *Los indios de México*, I consider two citational practices, quotation and photography, studying the different ways that these inscribe ethnographic materials with traces of ‘talk’ and ‘pose.’ I first consider how Benítez employs in-text citations like reproductions of the voices that he hears in the field, examining a series of passages that Benítez transcribes from the extensive audio recordings that he makes of his sources talking—talking through oral histories, first-person testimonies, and songs and performances. Thinking about problems of transcription, recording, and reproduction, I consider the ways that we can observe Benítez’ continued hand in shaping the ‘direct’ quotations that he proposes to use to shift the dynamic of voices in his ethnography, foregrounding the voices of his sources while looking to adopt an editorial over authorial role in the text. Yet by focusing my reading on a set of shamanic performances that Benítez prints in the text like direct transfers from his audiotape recordings to his text, I suggest that the citations themselves register an intentionality of ‘talk,’ observing how the quotations recall and reference voices within Benítez’ text in ways that echo within the ethnographic record without necessarily being intended for it. Thinking about the ethnographer as often listening in, more than orchestrating or overseeing the talk of fieldwork that gets registered in tape-recordings and texts, I then extend this discussion to think about the ways that the photographs that accompany and converse with Benítez’ text work like citations that similarly draw attention to the multiple parties and presences that participate in making *Los indios de México*. In Héctor García’s photographs of the Cora *Semana Santa* (Holy Week) festival included in volume three, I suggest that we can see the camera working as “an instrument of citation” (Cadava)
that arrests bodies in movement by seizing images of the Cora dancers on film, and yet
simultaneously inscribes their ‘poses’—their gestures and bodily postures—within the
ethnographic record in ways that give them a kind of afterlife.

If critical ethnography scholarship has theorized the inherent ambivalence of
ethnographic objects often in terms of a crisis of ethnographic authority and questions of
writing and textualization—that is, as a practice of graphing cultures into written texts—then
the readings here grapple with the intentionality of ethnographic materials themselves
alongside the stories of the people who produce them. I suggest that re-thinking the
photographs, recordings, writings, and archives that are made ethnographic, to think back to
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, involves complicating the ethnographer’s position of privilege and
noticing what resists or escapes her intentions. Yet I also try to problematize a way of reading
that can reinscribe the ethnographer’s position of privilege, a reading practice in which the
ethnographer becomes the focal point of ethnographic encounters and the party principally
responsible for the making and re-making of ethnographic materials. The essays that follow
bring out a series of ethno-modalities—modes of ethnographic inscription and creation—that
move across photography, writing, and audio-recording to consider the messiness of
fieldwork, the excess of ethnographic records and archives, and the unpredictability and
unruliness of ethnographic objects in terms of what they inscribe and produce.

Postscript:

Aldeia Maracanã residents were forcibly evicted from the Antigo Museu by riot police on March
22, 2013. Although plans have not been finalized, Rio’s governor has suggested that the
Antigo Museu building will be demolished and the grounds turned into a parking lot or home
for an Olympic Sports Museum, in anticipation of the 2016 Summer games. Aldeia residents
continue to protest and have attempted to retake the Museu grounds multiple times. They also
continue to pursue their legal claim to the site in Rio’s courts and are pressing for the
government to either return the Antigo Museu or grant them lands in an alternative part of Rio
de Janeiro where they can establish a permanent research center for Brazilian indigenous
cultures.
Chapter One

Rescuing the Ruin?
Ethno-Photography as Salvage in Gertrude Duby Blom’s Imágenes lacandonas

No remnant of this race hangs around the ruins . . . It lay before us like a shattered bark in the midst of the ocean, her masts gone, her name effaced, her crew perished, and none to tell whence she came, to whom she belonged, how long on her voyage, or what caused her destruction; her lost people to be traced only by some fancied resemblance in the construction of the vessel, and, perhaps, never to be known at all.
—John L. Stephens, Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán (1841)

At first glance, Gertrude Duby Blom’s photograph gives the feel of a tourist snapshot: there are jungle trees filling the sky, a towering building in ruins in the backdrop, and two human figures pictured in the shadow of an architectural remnant of times and civilizations past. The building itself, a stone structure overgrown with sprouts of vegetation, dominates the center of the photo’s frame. Still, it is the two Lacandon indians pictured that draw the eye, despite being dwarfed in size by the structure behind. Members of a Mayan people group from southeastern Mexico that Blom initially encountered through the work of French anthropologist Jacques Soustelle, whose ethnography depicted the Lacandon as secluded, primitive, and languishing, the two men who appear in the image are more arrested in motion than posed for the shot. Dressed in long white tunics and identified in the caption as father and son, they catch the light and movement of the scene. Both are mid-step, with backs turned to the camera and bags strapped over their shoulders as they journey closer to the site.

Taken in the shadow of the Hachäkyum temple in Yaxchilán, Chiapas, Gertrude Blom’s image raises questions about photography’s use as a medium for salvaging indigenous cultures perceived to be on the brink of extinction. Although her work has received little critical attention, Blom was an avid photographer, producing over 55,000 images — most of them featuring indigenous subjects — over the course of numerous archeological and anthropological expeditions throughout southern Mexico.

1 Thousands of these images piled up (most undeveloped) alongside the collections that Blom amassed in the archives of the Casa Na Bolom she opened in San Cristobal de las Casas in 1951, while others illustrated

1 The few critics who engage her photographs tend to liken the imágenes lacandonas she left behind following her death in 1993 to static, eulogistic tombs in which she “suspendió . . . paisajes, rostros, actitudes, y gigantescos árboles que, como a ella, no volveremos a ver . . .” (Ruiz 11, emphasis mine). See Gustavo Armendáriz Ruiz’ brief prologue to the posthumously published selection of Blom’s photographs entitled Imágenes lacandonas as well as Alex Harris’ introduction to the companion text to Blom’s exhibit at Duke’s Center for Documentary Photography, entitled Bearing Witness. In Reinventing the Lacandon, Brian Gollnick also gives brief readings of a few of Blom’s photographs.
anthropology texts and publications with an ethnographic flair, including *La selva lacandona* (co-written with Blom’s husband, an archeologist and cartographer) and articles for institutions like the Smithsonian and Mexico’s *Instituto Nacional Indigenista*. As Blom’s photographs surfaced in these contexts, they were offered up to visually corroborate romantic renderings of the Lacandon as isolated, soon-to-disappear heirs to the Maya, especially the version born in anthropological circles that constructed Lacandon culture as a cautionary tale of indigenous culture-becoming-ruin. A 1949 magazine article entitled “Man and the Jungle” reproduced five of Blom’s *imágenes lacandonas*, claiming that the images offered readers a glimpse into “the all but impenetrable forests inhabited by the nearly extinguished Lacandon Indians” where “in the shade of the mysterious Bonampak, in the heart of the Chiapas jungle, Maya blood survives.” In the process of painting the Lacandon people as rare and unlikely survivors, portrayals like this one correlated Lacandon culture with then-recently uncovered archeological sites like Bonampak—a site along the Usumacinta River heralded as a long-forgotten city, full of ancient wonders, unearthed tombs, and detailed frescoes still flecked with color, but crumbling. As if as old and enchanting as the ruins sprinkled throughout the region where they reside, Lacandon communities were cast in a similar state of disintegration and decay.

The ruins-Lacandon coupling would appear in a number of Blom’s images as well, though in a way that problematizes what James Clifford writes about as the salvage paradigm—a paradigm that frames ‘vanishing’ cultures like objects of rescue, cultural authenticities that the ethnographer urgently salvages before they are presumably lost. Questions of salvage as both an archeological practice and a practice of cultural study surface as a leitmotif in Blom’s images. Photographs of cracked stone statues, archeological artifacts destined for the museum, and reconstructed Maya palaces and towers abound in Blom’s archive, suggesting that she used photography at times to catalogue objects and structures unearthed in the field. Clusters of her other images directly pair Lacandon subjects with Mayan ruins. At first glance, this pairing can seem to frame the subjects and the archeological sites as *ruins*—that is, as remnants of the past that can evoke a combination of “backward-looking nostalgia” and “preservationist drive,” to borrow from Michael J. Lazzara and Vicky Unruh’s discussion of ruins in Latin America (3, 4). And yet, a number of Blom’s images confront the association with stasis, collapse, and preservation that we might use to characterize archeological and cultural ruins alike.

The image that Blom takes of Chan K’in Viejo and his son scaling the hill to the Hachäkyum temple offers a look into a subset of Blom’s body of work that specifically

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2 See Analisa Taylor *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination* on the *Instituto*, which was Mexico’s principal federal agency for indigenous peoples from 1948-2003.

3 Article found in Gertrude Duby Blom’s personal archive at *Casa Na Bolom*. The murals at Bonampak started receiving attention in international archeology in 1947. Joel W. Palka’s study *Unconquered Lacandon Maya* suggests that the mural’s ‘discovery’ and that of Lacandon communities mirrored one another. See two photographs that he reprints from *The Illustrated London News* 9 Aug. 1947. He captions one of the images with a quote from the accompanying article: “An Amazing Discovery in the Field of Maya Archeology: One of the Carved Stelae Found at Bonampak... and the Lacandon Indians, a Dwindling Tribe of Pure Descendants of the Mayas” (in Palka 2).

4 See Clifford’s essay “The Others: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm,” discussed later in this chapter.

5 In their joint introduction to *Telling Ruins in Latin America*, Lazzara and Unruh argue that a preservationist approach fuels visions of Latin America’s physical and cultural ruins that threaten to overshadow the creative renderings or generative thinking ruins of various kinds can stimulate. On nostalgia, see also Svetlana Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia*.
complicates the salvage mode and its photographic manifestations. Picturing a relationship between architectural ruins, indigenous subjects, and ethno-photographer, Blom’s Yaxchilán photo immediately brings to the fore a theatre of complex dynamics between cultural traces and the people who gather, interpret, and frame them. The photographic negative, although exposed only to a flash of the scene in front of the camera, registers a telling instance of contact between Blom and her subjects. Armed with an apparatus associated in and outside formal anthropology with the power to preserve a scene and create an accurate, visual record of an instant in time, Blom employs the camera here in a way that secures a record of a Lacandon cultural practice that was feared to be vanishing. Nineteenth-century explorers judged the religious pilgrimage to Yaxchilán that Blom pictures nearly obsolete, and they cited its rarity as proof of the Lacandon’s state of crisis, further motivating their projects to gather evidence of such practices before they were presumably lost. The archeological ruins that tower above Chan K’in Viejo and his son resonate with these portrayals of the Lacandon that Blom knew well; much like the Hächäkyum temple, the Lacandon had been repeatedly figured as a representative anthropological remnant—a people from another time now deteriorating, a culture in ruins. Excavated and scrutinized by archeologists, partially dismantled so that fragments could be preserved, deciphered, and displayed at institutions including Mexico City’s Museo Nacional de Antropología and The British Museum in London, the temple Blom positions to nearly overtake her photograph’s depth of field references an epistemological tradition that would relegate the Lacandon to a similar status as artifacts to be collected and catalogued, salvaged and preserved as ethnological remnants of a lost time.

And yet, rather than reinscribe this tradition, her image opens up the possibility for photography in particular to do more than document or reify indigenous cultures as ruins. Within the space of the ruin, Blom’s image communicates a sense of dynamism. By photographing the two Lacandon men as climbing en route to the temple, Blom presents them as active subjects and Hächäkyum as a destination—a visited site linked to various sets of living cultural practices, rather than one dominated by the photographer’s eye or inscribed meanings. Chan K’in Viejo and his son journey up to the temple for a purpose that the image can only suggest, but their engagement permeates the scene. Pictured in medias res, carrying supplies, the two men participate in the photograph’s production, gesturing toward alternate perspectives on the same scene and the potential for Hächäkyum and their relationship to it to constitute more than objects of curiosity to be studied and preserved in Blom’s lens. The travelling men are ‘captured’ and ‘preserved’ in the photograph Blom ‘takes,’ but they are captured mid-step and in movement; the man appearing to lead the way to the temple has his left arm extended, as if to maintain his balance during the climb, and both men’s legs are blurred by motion. Blom’s notes also reference the fact that the two subjects led her to the sacred site, known as the home of the Lacandon creator-god and an exclusively male place of worship. She may have been unable to access it otherwise.

The image Blom takes stands as testament to this sense of joint pilgrimage and co-production, mobilizing a perspective on the Hächäkyum temple and her Lacandon subjects that invites a critical look into salvage as an episteme. The image brings into focus a concern with how the Lacandon specifically were constructed as ethnological artifact, temporally out-of-place, and in need of rescue. In the process, it also lays bare many of the assumptions that

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6 On the characterization of Mexican indigenous subjects and cultures in terms of stone artifacts, petrified objects, and disjecta, see Elizabeth Segre’s Intersecting Identities and the introduction to Armando Bartra’s De fotógrafos y de indígenas.
underpin the salvage approach to indigenous culture and photography’s role as a technology coded as ideal for the work of preserving and thus ‘saving’ threatened cultural realities. In Blom’s lens, the architectural and ethnological ‘ruins’ of Yaxchilán and Lacandon culture emerge as a conjoined site of inquiry—one where cultural knowledge and meaning are produced, more than rescued. Together they constitute a site for problematizing larger assumptions about temporality, authority, and impending loss that the very work of cultural salvage implies.

‘Fixing’ and Preserving Photographically:
Photography’s Relationship to the ‘Real’ & La fotografía del México indio

If Blom’s photograph challenges the view of Hachäkyum and the Lacandon as static, threatened objects of knowledge (anthropological, archeological, or otherwise), it also complicates how we commonly read photography as a technology of power—power to capture and possess, as well as to preserve and record. Geoffrey Batchen argues that photography as a technology and “conception” was born out of an almost-obsessive desire to fix—to secure what Barthes calls the “certificate of presence” and inscribe objects and bodies with visual “truth-value” (Barthes 87). In the eighteenth century, amateur chemists from Europe to Brazil originated what Batchen calls this “dilemma of photography’s ontology”; they experimented with light-sensitive, silver-nitrate compounds to try to “copy” and “procure” shadows, with their sights set on discovering a chemical process that could catch and preserve, not just represent, reality (Burning 27, 25, 212). Then in 1939, the news that Frenchman Louis Daguerre had ‘invented’ the daguerreotype launched photography from private laboratories into the public imagination as a technology with this kind of revolutionary potential. The Academie des Science eagerly proclaimed it a miraculous “process to fix the different objects reflected in the camera obscura,” and photographs quickly took on the indexical qualities of footprints or fingerprints—records that had an intimate, even traceable, connection with reality. Photography, a chemical process that records a visual imprint of the body or object in the viewfinder on a light-sensitive surface, offered a uniquely suited means to preserve everything from scientific specimens to personal memories in a way thought to secure proof of ‘what has been’ and actually capture some residue of the real. This promised a clear advantage over other modes of representation and made photographs take on an immediate and widespread reputation as material objects that afforded not only photographers, but also viewers and collectors, a particular kind of power. As one early Kodak Company advertisement promised, “[Kodak] enables the fortunate possessor to go back by the light of his own fireside to scenes which would otherwise fade. . . and be lost.” (Forget 8, emphasis mine).

Photography’s reputation for “unmediated realism,” permanence, and power heightened its indexical possibilities beyond the realm of personal collections as well, causing many late

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7 Mexican critic Olivier Debroise has also challenged the notion that reproducibility was at the heart of photography’s beginnings, writing that “The invention of photography was less a question of finding a way to reproduce images than of retaining them, fixing them permanently on a support” (Mexican Suite 18).
8 Batchen’s own Forget Me Not; Photography and Remembrance traces the limitations this conception of photography came up against, however. In it, Batchen explores a variety of vernacular practices like tinting and locket-making that mark photographs as insufficient memory objects by suggesting that they require supplementation. On Kodak’s marketing campaigns and how they shaped photography in the Mexican imagination specifically, see Ruben Gallo’s Mexican Modernity.
nineteenth and early twentieth-century anthropologists to promote it as an empirical medium par excellence, ideal for recording and preserving threatened cultures before they ‘disappeared’ from view (Burning 37). As Christopher Pinney and Elizabeth Edwards have shown, photography and anthropology shared a kind of parallel or co-history. The mid-nineteenth century rise in photographic technology and “awareness” supplied evidence for and expanded the circulation of the emerging currency of anthropological discourse: cultures (Raw 34). Photographs served as key players in the ‘economies of truth’ at work in shaping the ‘collective fictions’ and ‘ethnographic collections’ that are cultures, to borrow James Clifford’s vocabulary; they also acquired enhanced value precisely at a moment when the study of cultures was dominated by a salvage mode. “Now is the time to record,” A.C. Haddon urged in the introduction to his primer The Study of Man (1898), “The most interesting materials of study are becoming lost to us, not only by their disappearance, but by the apathy of those who should delight in recording them before they become lost to sight and memory” (in Raw 164).

For many spurred by this project of cultural salvage as it picked up pace in the twentieth century, photography represented an unequaled technology of rescue. Imbued with “an expectation of objectivity,” photographs were championed as invaluable pieces of data across the sciences, and anthropologists, mindful of the limits of written description, handmade sketches, or gathered objects to index what they had observed in the field, began to rely on photography as an unequaled mode of collection, and more specifically, salvage (Raw 37). By the late 1890s, anthropologists were using photography to document the lifeways of threatened people groups, but the salvage ethnography movement spearheaded by Franz Boas and others in the early twentieth-century brought increased focus to photographic inscription as a means to combat the absolute disappearance of indigenous traditions they feared unable to weather the encroaching changes brought by modernity. At a moment when most anthropological production “clusters around concerns with disappearance, presence and absence and the seen and unseen,” as Edwards writes, salvage ethnographers seized on the medium to preserve cultural ‘authenticities’ for human patrimony and future research and thus more widely intervene in the fate of peoples they saw “die[ing] under our very eyes,” (in Raw 10). Photography seems to have offered these practitioners the opportunity to marry the values of empiricism and conservation—a way to “transform an unseen or unseeable cultural past into a visual representation for ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’” as well as ensure that some record of that past or present had been secured (Raw 157).

But if photography has long been promoted by some as powerful enough to preserve a reality—cultural, personal—before it slips away, this quintessential technology of fixing also carries a polemical reality effect. “Our expectation of photographs is grounded. . . in the way that they are the product of light reflected off an object on to a sensitized film or plate, and

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9 See Pinney “The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and Photography,” as well as Emmanuel Garrigues “La savoir etnographique de la photografic,” in which he asks whether photography contributed to the birth of ethnography or visa versa.

10 See Clifford’s “Partial Truths” in Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography and The Predicament of Culture.

11 A monumental figure in North-American anthropology, Boas conducted fieldwork with the Eskimo in Canada and ran Columbia’s anthropology program. See generally George Stocking’s introduction to A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology. Boas’ work informed much of Gertrude Blom’s thought, especially his theory of relativism and rejection of hierarchies of race. She cites his fundamental work The Mind of Primitive Man (1911) in the booklet she publishes for the Mexican government in 1944 entitled “¿Hay razas inferiores?”.
thus chemically inscribed,” Edwards writes. “In bald terms, the substantive relationship between the photograph and its referent is analogical; it offers a beguiling realism” (Raw 9). Focusing on the flows of power that photographs can mask under the guise of ‘truth’, Allan Sekula, John Tagg, and Christopher Pinney, among others, have documented abuses of photography’s ‘analogical’ connection to the real across the globe, demonstrating how the medium’s ‘fixing’ possibilities have been employed to inscribe alterity and exercise control in arenas including law and criminology, psychiatry, racial and cultural taxonomy, and colonial imaginaries. 12 For Tagg in particular, photographs’ association with reality—although not so much physical as semiotic—charges photographic images with a “burden of representation” and creates a discursive (and dangerous) system in which “a photograph can come to stand as evidence” (4, his emphasis).

But evidence of what? Record of what reality and whose? Scholars of Mexican photography stress photographs’ currency as empirical proof, arguing that the medium’s use to bolster the objectification and marginalization of indigenous subjects and cultures represents a defining feature of the history of photography in and about the country. As Jesse Lerner describes, soon after the first daguerreotype apparatus arrived to Mexico in 1839, “[T]he Indian became an object of study and scrutiny in a positivist project of gathering and analyzing data. The camera, with its purported objectivity, was especially suited for this task” (Images 239-40). Captured by the cameras of scientists, foreign travelers, and national photographers, images of Mexican indigenous subjects circulated on postcards, cartes-de-visite, and the pages of magazines and books as symbols of Mexican identity, objects of tourist and anthropologists’ curiosity, and image-specimens for pseudo-sciences like craniometry and anthropometry (Mraz 48-49). 15 As the country at large was converted into what Mexican anthropologist Juan Cajas calls an “ethnographic laboratory,” the photographic apparatus was used in attempts to catalogue the ‘Indio mexicano’ and codify indigeneity. 14 Marina Pérez de Mendiola argues that between 1890 and 1950 the positivistic possibilities of what she calls “ethnic photography” in the country resonated with photography’s widespread use as a technology of marginalization and repression, particularly as an extension of state surveillance and social control. 15 Photography introduced Mexican indigenous subjects into a variety of visual economies—national and international, scientific, etc.—she argues, but it also contained them within regimes of power and knowledge not unlike the mandatory identification cards and photographic catalogs of low-wage workers and social deviants (prostitutes, criminals) put together by the Mexican state (130). 16

Together with a concern about how photographs operate as powerful indices of identity, contemporary scholarship on indigenous subjects in Mexican photography betrays an underlying concern with the fundamentals of how photographs are made. Susan Sontag’s

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13 Mendiola cites the examples of foreigners like the Norwegian Karl (Carl) Lumholtz and North American C.B. Waite, as well as Mexican photographers like the famed Agustín Casasola (for whom the famous Casasola archive is named). On constructions of national identity and photographs of indigenous subjects, see Elizabeth Segre’s *Intersected Identities*, Mraz “Envisioning Mexico.”
14 “The travel accounts and ‘scientific’ paintings of the early ‘ethnologists,’ thus soon codified the way in which native people were understood. . . Mexico. . . developed a strange sense of ‘internal exoticism’ and adopted the codes established by foreign travelers for its own national self-definition” (Debroise 115).
15 Mendiola emphasizes theories by Foucault and Susan Sontag.
16 See Mraz “Ver y controlar: la fotografía carecelaria.” This reading also resonates with Roger Bartra’s talk of photographs as “pieles de papel” (10) and Debroise’s description of their function as “paper prison[s]” (45) See “A flor de piel” and “Prisoners and Prostitutes, Masters and Servants” in *Mexican Suite*, respectively.
now-famous metaphor comparing the camera to a “predatory weapon” that shoots in parallel acts of murder and nostalgic need has become a tenet for thinking about violence as inherent in any photographic event, and following this line of thinking, many theorists who study la fotografía del México indio question whether a technology of capture can render more than documents that simultaneously demonstrate and contribute to indigenous subjects’ victimization.17 John Mraz has argued that photographers in Mexico commonly approach indigenous subjects as “cazadores que capturan, involucrados en un pillaje subliminal, predatorio e intrusivo” (Nacho López 66). Elizabeth Segre and the group of visual anthropologists and cultural critics who contributed to the inquisitive text De fotografos y de indios also emphasize photography’s roots in mechanical and chemical processes of fixing, suggesting that photography’s relationship to indigeneity is automatically plagued by its means of production.18 Taking a photograph presupposes an indigenous subjects’ ‘exposure’ and a photographers’ act to apprehend on film, they maintain. As a result, whether photography can allow for a portrait of indigenous identity as more than fixed and immutable becomes a kind of loaded question.19

Perhaps the most gripping and influential characterization of la fotografía del México indio as a problematic, however, comes from Mexican anthropologist and critic Roger Bartra and his discussion of “la disección fotográfica del indio”—the photographic dissection of the Indian.20 In his prologue to El ojo de vidrio—an anthology of Mexican “fotografía del temo étnico” from the past hundred years—Bartra condenses the relationship between photography and the country’s indigenous subjects into a singular process of hunting, gutting, stuffing, and displaying that reflects and shapes the Mexican collective unconscious. He argues that the medium converts indigenous bodies and cultures into specimens befitting museum halls and a national reality that appropriates them only as hollow icons. Even in a set of 1940s ‘art’ photographs that earned enough recognition to be exhibited in Mexico’s premier cultural center, el Palacio de Bellas Artes, Bartra finds vestiges of the forensic: “[R]evelan la influencia de la fotografía especializada en producir fichas de identidad para los archivos policíacos,” he writes and ascribes ethnographic images with a similar intent to imprison and profile. By ‘portrasting’ “indios como si fueran piedras, plantas o insectos” and inflicting them with a clear “intención museográfica,” these photographs code their subjects as ethnic or cultural specimens to be collected, scrutinized, and preserved as if they belonged to an endangered species or a nostalgic past, Bartra argues (10). He compares photographed indigenous subjects to stuffed skins, immobilized and emptied out of interiority, and calls the

17 This issue is the focus of an emerging body of scholarship focused on recuperating histories of photography not dominated by ‘Western’ models of visuality and photography. See generally Photography’s Other Histories.
18 It is worth noting that the work of scholars like Rubén Gallo suggests that the polemic of photography’s relationship to indexicality in Mexican photographic practice has taken a variety of forms. He holds that mid-twentieth-century art photographers defined their art in terms of a disavowal of photography’s indexical properties.
19 Elizabeth Segre also illustrates how methods of reproduction and circulation continue the photographer’s initial act of violence, showing how mass-produced postcards of indigenous ‘types’ invited the public to add further layers to the photographer’s initial act of inscription. Postcards, she argues, made these images and visions of Mexican indigeneity more physically mobile, but they also provided material surfaces on which the sender could literally write over the bodies and faces of the photographed subjects. See examples provided in Intersected Identities.
20 This essay was reproduced, in English translation, as “Stuffing the Indian Photographically” in the Mexico-focused issue of History of Photography edited by John Mraz.
photographer a “fotodermista”—a taxidermist of the visual medium who preserves empty, lifeless surfaces (10, 2).

According to Bartra, the nature of the photographic apparatus, the photographer’s position of power, and the economies of knowledge and meaning in which photographs move all converge to transform the photographed indio mexicano into “una figura vacía” (“an empty figure”), rendering Mexican indigeneity as a play of empty ‘superficies’ that then become receptacles for (pseudo)knowledge and desire. At one point he acknowledges photography’s ‘unconscious optic,’ hinting that the unexpected can burst the photographic regime (and photographer’s control) to allow subjects to momentarily escape the trappings of the photographic frame. However, the dissection process that he details accentuates photography as inseparable from indexicality, and his language of taxonomy and skin aligns the medium with concurrently profiling and museum-ifying indigenous identity. In his reading, photography flattens el indio mexicano into “una epidermis de papel impreso”—an epidermis of imprinted paper—like a two-dimensional diorama specimen. This image resonates with scientific discourse (‘epidermis’) and relates photographs to other kinds of indices like fingerprints, whose relationship to reality exceeds representation or referentiality. 21 It also sets up a double-significance for the participle impreso. Here, the derivative of the verb imprimir (to print) denotes the inscriptive mode of photographic technology (etymologically speaking, photography means to write with light), but impreso also contains implicit reference to the state of being imprisoned (estar preso), as if photography’s connection to reality by way of recording prints or impressions is as binding in identity terms as it is in chemical ones. In this way, la fotografía del México indio for Bartra represents a world of skins and surfaces that circulate as objects of study and remnants of a “vanished ancient world” (Stuffing 238). 22

The photographs Gertrude Blom ‘shoots’ or ‘takes’ of Lacandon subjects cannot help but carry some of this complicated history—one in which photographic technology and photographs as material objects facilitate the study, circulation, and display of indigenous subjects as if emptied out and devoid of contemporary life. Yet, what is contained in the images Blom ‘captures’ throws her apparent monopoly over the Lacandon subjects she pictures into question, often circumventing the desiccation process Bartra describes. Even the ‘ethnographic’ photographer, in Blom’s example, upsets the medium’s reputation for constituting the photographer as an exclusive locus of knowledge—a preserver and cataloguer of surfaces. If photography affords a technology uniquely equipped for capturing, emptying out, and rendering bodies and subjectivities into collectable surfaces onto which knowledge can be readily inscribed, the question is what else gets recorded? What else gets ‘let in’ when the shutter opens, when light bounces off the who or what in the camera’s view to be registered on the photographic negative?

Indigeneity as Ruin in Anthropological and Mexican Cultural Imaginations

By the time Gertrude Blom made first contact with the Lacandon in 1943, indigenous peoples increasingly figured into the Mexican cultural imagination as part of a celebrated pre-conquest past allowed little presence in contemporary life. During the Porfiriato—the almost thirty-year dictatorship that lasted until the Mexican Revolution of 1910—the country’s

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21 For a brief summary of theories of the index, especially as they inform understandings of photography, see Rúben Gallo’s “Cameras” chapter in Mexican Modernity.
22 See Mendiola’s reading of Bartra (154).
European heritage (albeit rooted in conquest and colonization) took center stage in discourses about the nation, while ‘artifacts’ from disparaged indigenous peoples supplied the rapidly expanding collections at places like the Museo Nacional Mexicano (now Mexico City’s famed Museo Nacional de Antropología). Analisa Taylor has argued that, in the aftermath of the Revolution, newly-founded state institutions and aesthetic movements sought to validate Mexico’s indigenous cultures and histories, but the ever-transforming constructions of indigeneity they promoted still tended to reduce entire people groups to remnants of a lost past, survivors whose anachronous ways of life were the stuff of museums and unsuited for a changing post-revolutionary state. She suggests that national organizations like the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), envisioned under President Lázaro Cárdenas alongside a progressive set of social programs in the 1930s, framed the country’s indigenous as endangered sources of knowledge, aiming to facilitate their assimilation into national culture while maintaining an ambiguous relationship with their actual political and societal inclusion. Even the broader indigenista movement that strove to recognize the country’s indigenous communities and combat their marginalization harbored a seeming contradiction, Taylor argues. Although participants fought to draw attention to indigenous social and political struggles as pressing and ongoing, they often portrayed their subjects “as if stuck at the threshold between a timeless, remote world and the everyday world of unfolding history” (Indigeneity 3).

Visual media, especially photography, played an important role in producing indigenous subjects and cultures as if static relics, suspended in time. In the nineteenth century, foreign adventurer-explorers like Désiré Charnay, Diget, and Teobert Maler established what would grow into a familiar visual trope attaching Mexican indigeneity to the space and time of ruins. They posed and photographed indigenous subjects—usually hired laborers or travel guides—directly alongside the pre-columbian buildings or excavated artifacts they claimed to have discovered during their expeditions. These images exhibited indigenous bodies and archeological finds side-by-side as co-representative of the ‘lost’ civilizations of the Americas that men like Maler and Charnay marketed to their predominantly European audiences as treasure troves of artifacts and knowledge. The explorers themselves often claimed the indio-ruin pairing served a practical, even scientific, function, arguing that using indigenous subjects like human rulers allowed them to impart a sense of scale to places and objects foreign to European eyes. Yet the gesture also situated these subjects within a topography of preservationism. In these images, indigenous bodies functioned as both “[un] elemento de verosimilitud y referente de la monumentalidad de las ruinas” and a “corolario de la audacia del arqueólogo y el naturista” (De fotógrafos y de indios 37).

In the early twentieth-century, Mexican photographers like Nacho López and Manuel Álvarez Bravo shunned many of the conventions of this photographic tradition and the

23 See Mraz “Photographing Mexico.”
24 Debroise’s Mexican Suite dedicates a section to each of these figures and includes a sample of their photographs. Maler is a particularly important predecessor to Blom and cited in much of her writings. Maler gained a name for himself as a lecturer at the Paris Société Géographique, where he presented many of the images he had collected while traveling across Mexico in the 1870s, and his reputation as a scholar earned him funds from Harvard’s Peabody Museum to return to the country—and Chiapas, specifically—for a series of expeditions in 1898, 1899-1900, and 1904-1905 (Harris 30, Debroise 94).
25 Mendiola describes how, between 1890 and 1930, Mexican ‘officialist’ photographers like Agustín Víctor Casasola, Porfirio Díaz’ personal photographer, “captured the ethnic photographic image in a manner similar to that of foreign anthropological inquiry of the time by objectifying members of the native communities” (130).
“imperial eyes” it implies, shifting towards including indigenous subjects in their experiments in photojournalism, documentary, and art photography. 26 Still, many of the images they produced continued to pair ruins and Mexican indigenous subjects, often like pieces of a collectable past. Admired by the French Surrealists, Álvarez Bravo collaborated with poet Benjamin Péret to publish _Los tesoros del Museo Nacional de México_ — a catalog-like book about the Aztec ‘treasures’ held in the national museum — and, as a photographer, he often depicted indigenous subjects in a similar mode. _Joven Maya de Tulum_ ( _Mayan Boy of Tulum, 1946_) one of Álvarez Bravo’s most acclaimed shots, pictures its young subject as a human counterpart to the ruins of the Mayan port-city Tulum, located on the eastern side of the Yucatan peninsula. The photograph’s title bears a resemblance to the exotifying anonymity of anthropometric and ‘type’ photographs in that it labels Bravo’s unnamed subject with generic markers (“boy,” “Mayan”), but it also declares the boy as of Tulum (not “at” or even “in”), as if he inherently belonged to the ruin. Jesse Lerner argues that the image’s composition creates a relationship between Mayan ruins and ‘Mayan boy’ that in fact likens the boy to a “living fossil,” writing, “The _Mayan Boy of Tulum_ stands next to a carved relief of a skull, strikingly similar in shape. Their balanced positions in the frame suggest an equivalence” (“Images” 241, 242).

As popular Mexican magazines in the 30s and 40s like _Hoy_ and _Siempre_ similarly painted _el México indio_ as an archaic world, populated with specter-like presences, _indigenista_ advocates depicted the deterioration of Mexico’s on the level of national crisis. 28 Figures like Alfonso Caso, the “architect” of the _Instituto Nacional Indigenista_ (INI), endorsed an agenda driven by collection and assimilation. 29 State-institutions like the _Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia_ (INAH) and _Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia_ (ENAH) largely ran in a salvage mode, commissioning students and practitioners to accumulate pre-columbian artifacts, oral histories, and contemporary indigenous material culture guided by a set of clear objectives — “el rescate, investigación y difusión del patrimonio histórico nacional” (A. Bartra 7). As many scholars describe, in the climate of a nation envisioned at a crossroads — post-colonial, post-Porfirian, post-revolution — Mexico’s indigenous past represented a critical component that was in the process of being salvaged and put to use in the creation of new national identities. 30

Anxieties about a ‘vanishing’ indigenous Mexico and photography’s role in salvaging it...

26 Here I refer to Mary Louise Pratt’s seminal work _Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation_. Although Pratt does not analyze photography specifically, her framework is useful for thinking about the connection between visuality and mastery generally, as well as the role of the photographer as someone who wields an apparatus ideal for the purposes of extending the gaze of “the seeing man,” “whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” (7).

27 On top of tracing this “conceit” through Álvarez Bravo’s work, Lerner locates it as the conceptual core of the opening sequence in Sergei Eisenstein’s much-acclaimed, unfinished film _Qué Viva México!_ (242). See also Elizabeth Segre’s chapter on disjecta in _Intersecting Identities_.

28 Photographs in these commonly represented indigeneity through an optic of death or loss, positioning indigenous subjects within scenes of mourning, burial, and ritual. See Mraz’ _Nacho López y el fotoperiodismo_, which discusses López’ _fotorecado_ ‘Noche de Muertos’ and ‘Entierro’ as two important examples. Mraz argues that the unique _fotorecado_ (literally, photoessay) genre played a critical role in shaping shifting visions of photography and indigeneity in Mexico during this period.

29 See Segre, Taylor, and Debroise. “The distanced, scientific approach of the non-Mexican nineteenth-century ethnologists was superseded by an internal analysis that revalidated and aestheticized these marginal areas of the country’s society. Out of this process, a unified national identity would be forged” (Debroise 132). It is important to underscore that _indigenismo_ is not a monolithic movement, and in fact takes many different forms in Latin America and within Mexico itself. See Majluf’s study, which focuses on Mexico and Peru, specifically.

30 See Segre, Taylor, and Debrouise. “The distanced, scientific approach of the non-Mexican nineteenth-century ethnologists was superseded by an internal analysis that revalidated and aestheticized these marginal areas of the country’s society. Out of this process, a unified national identity would be forged” (Debroise 132). It is important to underscore that _indigenismo_ is not a monolithic movement, and in fact takes many different forms in Latin America and within Mexico itself. See Majluf’s study, which focuses on Mexico and Peru, specifically.
surround Gertrude Blom’s introduction to photography and the beginnings of her story with the Lacandon (Debroise 108). Blom was an almost accidental photographer, and the fact that a handful of her images would attain iconic status as testament to the precariousness of Lacandon life and the future of Mexican indigenous peoples appears no less coincidental. Born in the Swiss Alps in 1901, Blom’s first connection with Mexico—at least as she tells it—happened in the form of an anthropology text concerned with recovering the country’s indigenous roots, Jacques Soustelle’s Mexique: Terre Indienne, which she read while traveling to the country for the first time in the early 1940s. After fleeing persecution for her anti-fascist activities in Europe, Blom worked as a journalist in Mexico’s capital, where she earned the favor of an influential group of dignitaries and government officials who recommended she join a state-funded expedition to Chiapas—one that would put Blom in contact with the Lacandon indigenous communities she had formerly known only through Soustelle’s text. Not long before, Blom had begun to teach herself to use an Agfa Standard Camera she had purchased, and she practiced taking and printing her first photographs while researching and interviewing women who had fought in Emiliano Zapata’s army during the Mexican Revolution. With this inexpensive camera and little more than a rudimentary knowledge of how to use it, Blom traveled to the strip of land running along the Mexican-Guatemalan border in 1943 with the government’s first twentieth-century expedition to the area, which aimed to survey Lacandon living conditions and measure the communities’ need for government aid.

A cluster of communities consisting of less than a few hundred known inhabitants at the time, the Lacandon acquired a reputation by the 1940s as an indigenous group suspended in a kind of temporal limbo whose cultural survival was marked as glaringly uncertain. Depicted as the secluded, primitive descendants of the ancient Maya, the Lacandon were subject to extensive study by representatives from both the INI and the Chiapas government starting in the forties, but they had captivated international anthropologists and artists since almost a century before, in large part because of the luring combination of history and mythology surrounding the group. The popularity of texts like John L. Stephens’ meticulously illustrated and multi-volume *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* (1841) in the mid-nineteenth century sparked interest in the pre-conquest Mayan civilization and the cities in ruins they had left behind throughout southern Mexico and Central America. Historians proposed that the Lacandon had weathered the fall of the

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31 Although contemporary scholarship avoids extended analysis of Blom’s photographic production, she earns brief mention in Debroise, Mraz, and Gollnick.
32 In addition to his ethnographic work and publications on Pre-Columbian art and culture, Soustelle later becomes vice-director of Paris’ Musée de l’Homme.
33 Details of Blom’s life and work are limited and often contradictory. I rely here on The New York Times obituary from 1993 (which, telling of the dearth of information on Blom, had to be amended repeatedly), supplementary materials provided in Alex Harris’ Bearing Witness, the brief bio included in the appendix of 160 años de fotografía en México, and information gleaned from archival research I conducted at Casa Na Bolom in 2010. Blom infused her numerous publications, both articles and books, with a palpable autobiographical flair, and her version(s) of her story largely dictates much of this biographical material, especially that included in Bearing Witness, Imágenes lacandonas and the other publications funded by the Asociación Cultural Na Bolom. A few of her photos are included in the aforementioned texts, as well as in Mexico through Foreign Eyes and El ojo de vidrio: Cien años de fotografía del México indio.
34 See Gollnick’s chapter on Stephens in Reinventing the Lacandón and Sylvia Molloy’s essay “Translating Ruins: An American Parable” in Telling Ruins. Gollnick states, “More than any other source, these books helped redefine the Lacandón jungle as a privileged site for literally unearthing the past” (42).
major Mayan centers in the tenth century before fleeing parts of the Yucatán Peninsula and present-day Guatemala to take refuge in the dense jungle now known as la Selva lacandona—the Jungle of the Lacandon. Many claimed that there, isolated and protected, the Lacandon escaped Spanish conquest and, until centuries later, appeared only in obscure legal records and colonial chronicles charting the failed attempts at military or spiritual conquest in the region.\footnote{One example of these failures is the 1586 withdrawal by Juan de Morales Villavicencio following an attempted raid of Lacam-Tum, covered in Gollnick (21).} These portrayals of the Lacandon selva as an impenetrable threat to colonial dominion guarded by recalcitrant natives turn out to be long lived. One mid-nineteenth century map of Chiapas labeled the region a “desierto desconocido poseído por los lacandones”—an unknown desert possessed by the Lacandón—as if this area could only be named as unknowable and unnamable, outside the mapmakers’ imagination except as an impenetrable wasteland possessed by a mysterious other.\footnote{See Gollnick (12).}

Their distinction—though almost certainly a fiction—as the only Mayan indigenous group to elude Spanish control lingered into the twentieth century and made the Lacandon a particularly coveted object of anthropological study. Projects to record, salvage, and interpret their culture take on a fervent tone beginning in the 1920s, but figures like Teobert Maler and Alfred M. Tozzer had already set the tone decades before. An Italian-born German apt to fuse the roles of explorer, ethnographer, and archeologist, Maler took the earliest known ethnographic photographs of the Lacandon in 1889 (Maler, not too shy, labels the Lacandon subjects “wild and lionine”). Alfred M. Tozzer, a professionally trained anthropologist, then conducted fieldwork with Lacandon communities between 1902 and 1905. Citing the Lacandon’s ‘primitive’ lifestyle and extremely limited interactions with outsiders, both men proposed that the Lacandon constituted a kind of ethnological goldmine. Not long after their initial studies, anthropologists including Soustelle and linguists like Philip Baer posited that studying the community’s unique Maya-Yucateco tongue and religious practices had the potential to unlock clues to the lost Mayan civilization and culture. In the 1920s, archeologists like Gertrude Blom’s future husband, Franz Blom, hired Lacandon guides on treks through Chiapas and parts of Guatemala in search of uncharted ruins, while anthropology departments at universities including Harvard, Chicago, Berkeley, and Tulane launched extended, joint ethnological-archeological studies involving the Lacandon.\footnote{Franz Blom studied archeology at Harvard and is credited with making the first map of the Selva Lacandona.}

These projects and their discourses of recovery and impending cultural disappearance framed Gertrude Blom’s entrance onto the scene in the 1940s, even if her relationship to them was sometimes conflicted. Blom rejected formal ethnography and had a penchant for decrying the ways of the “antropolocos”—a play on the Spanish antropólogo and the adjective for crazy—yet her visits to the Lacandon and the texts and photographs she produced acquired contours of the archeological and ethnological interests of her companions. She often imagined the flip-side of the ethnographic gaze, describing the Lacandon as astute subjects in contrast with the chaos of “[E]se ir y venir de gente extraña vestida con pantalones que... lleva el pelo corto y que echa miradas curiosas al interior de sus adoratorios y les asombra con preguntas tontas sobre su ‘organizacion social’” (“The comings and goings of strangers wearing pants... who wear their hair short and look into the interiors of their homes with curiosity and surprise them with dumb questions about their ‘social organization’”
Still, many of her journals read like fieldnotes; they make attempts to outline the familial genealogy of a given community, describe the daily activities Blom had the opportunity to observe while in a Lacandon locale, and systematize the bits of the Maya tongue she was gradually working to learn. She photographed and published widely, supplying images and writing for museum expositions, local Mexican newspapers, *Harpers*, *Natural History*, and the Smithsonian on cultural and ecological conservation, indigenous rights, and her research with Lacandon communities. The need to ensure that Lacandon lifeways were studied and recorded, not left buried in the *selva* to die off and be forgotten, fills even her earliest accounts. In a letter written just months after her initial visit to the *Selva Lacandona*, Blom summed up the motivation behind the journeys she took with her future husband Franz as one where the search to find and recover buildings in ruins and members of the endangered culture in fact mirrored one another: “[Franz] se encontraba buscando ruinas Mayas, yo buscando Lacandones.”

A Politics of Time and Ruins: Picturing K’in Obregon at Lacanjá

Taken on one of Blom’s many visits to the Lacandon community in Lacanjá, near the Río Usumacinto Valley, Blom’s Lacanjá series seizes upon the trope of Lacandon culture as ruin, but takes a critical eye to the assumptions about temporality that the trope implies. Blom takes the series of photographs in 1961 on the steps of a two-story structure at the ruins of Lacanjá. In them, a Lacandon friend of Blom’s named K’in Obregon poses in front of one of three open archways. In certain shots he stands erect some distance from the camera but centered, his shoulders facing Blom and his chin tilted slightly to the right, while the building behind him occupies most of the photographic frame. In others, Blom zooms in for a close-up as K’in Obregon squats almost casually in front of the same structure, though this time he holds a thick roll of tobacco in his lips and looks squarely into Blom’s lens. Shown only a few feet behind K’in Obregon in both shots, the building in ruins functions as more than a happenstance backdrop to K’in’s dissimilar poses, however. Made of striated layers of limestone that clearly bear the marks of age, the building conjures up associations with inertia, loss, and fragmentation. In addition to his spatial proximity with the ruin, in the black-and-white palette of Blom’s Lacanjá images, K’in Obregon’s pale tunic matches the tone of the ruin’s stacked stones, creating an aesthetic coupling between architecture and man. On the surface, the photograph could appear to conflate K’in Obregon with ruins, consigning him to a distanced, suspended temporality and, in turn, photographically upholding an exclusionary politics of time. Ultimately the series presents both setting and subject in a way that alters the ruin’s standing as deadspace, however, while also deviating from the portrayal of a member of a culture supposedly on the verge of breakdown that viewers might expect.

In fact, in the Lacanjá images, Blom frames K’in Obregon with signs of life. In the standing shot, a cascade of vines drapes down from what appears to be a ceiba tree that has taken root in the thin layer of soil atop the ruins behind him. The bottom inch and a half of the photograph is dominated by a dark border of lush leaves and grasses, and a long line of

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38 Mary Louise Pratt describes this as “anthropology in reverse” and identifies these scenes as common within the travel literature genre. See her “Fieldwork in Common Places.”

39 Personal correspondence dated 25 Dec 1943 and found in Blom’s personal archive.

40 I use ’series’ in the literal sense to designate groups or clusters of photographs that, on the basis of archival research, I have identified as sharing dates, locations, and subjects.
plants grows along a shelf in the limestone structure immediately above the man’s head. In this way, K’in Obregon appears encircled, situated at the heart of a scene that testifies to nature’s tendency to envelope and reclaim sites like this, but one that also—and perhaps even more importantly—upsets viewers’ ability to characterize ruins as representative theaters of loss in the most basic sense. These ruins are growing things. They are fertile, alive, and dynamic. And while the visual contrast between the stacked, crumbling stone walls and the chaotic greenery that threatens to gradually overtake them is marked in the black-and-white photograph in terms of line and tone, the image shies away from reifying a kind of temporal juxtaposition between the Mayan civilization of the past and the contemporary life of the site.

With its abounding visual cues marking Lacanjá as a place with an undeniable present-tense, Blom’s photograph emphasizes points of meeting and overlap—a move that positions K’in Obregon within a ruin-space where multiple temporalities come into play. This, in turn, challenges many of the assumptions that we might make about the ruins themselves, complicating what a number of scholars highlight as a tendency to conceive of ruins as relegated to a discrete temporality. As Diana Taylor suggests in her contribution to the Telling Ruins collection, the term ruins, as well as the Spanish ruinas, suggests a space emptied out of contemporary use-value. Ruins are, at least following an archeological model, ruined; that is, their function and meaning hinge on their standing as sites for uncovering, extracting, and preserving material remnants and remains. “Ruin (or ruins), as a noun,” Diana Taylor writes, “conjures up mysterious and romanticized pasts. . . places where ‘we’. . . can perform the unimaginable, keep the past intact as past. . .” (“Performing” 13-14). But if Taylor suggests that ruins represent sites where visitors attempt to construct or affirm temporal divisions, Francine Masiello emphasizes in the same collection that the ruins themselves mark this as an impossibility: “The ruins stage an in-betweenness,” she writes, “On the one hand, a connection between past and present, between life and death; on the other, the transitory nature. . . a subtle movement in time in which nature comes back to reign over the works of human creation. In this way, the garden—or life itself—is always connected to ruins” (30). As Masiello describes them, ruins are about temporal touch and mingling, sites where growth inevitably ruptures our ability to relegate them to the past.

More than portray the ruin as a site to salvage remnants, Blom’s image of K’in Obregon standing in front the Lacanjá structure works via an aesthetic of multiplicity and synchronicity. Here, elements of the nature-setting (the vines, the trees) not only meet the ruin but join with it, become part of it, so that ‘past’ and ‘present’ intertwine and interact. In Blom’s image, life sprouts directly from the material ruins of the Mayan ‘past,’ and Blom takes the photograph in a way that draws attention to this commingling. In an image almost exploding with an excess of bold lines—vertical, horizontal, and crisscrossed—clear boundaries and divisions appear undeniably unsettled; the seams between the temple, the abundant flora, and the man who poses before them almost blur into one another, suggesting that the categories different compositional elements within the photograph could be taken to represent (Lacanjá as remnant, Lacandon as cultural ruin by association, for example) cannot hold.

In this way, the photograph questions the ruins’ standing as remnant—mere traces or leftovers of history whose relevance is attached to the past; it similarly breaks from constructing K’in Obregon as the ruins’ ethnological equivalent. The image resists positioning K’in Obregon within what Johannes Fabian famously termed the “time of the Other”—a

41 See the essays collected in Telling Ruins in Latin America, edited by Michael J. Lazzara and Vicky Unruh.
distanced temporal designation within an evolutionary model that uses expanses of time (and, by extension, stages of ‘development,’ ‘civilization,’ etc.) to structure a hierarchy of cultures. “Time, much like language or money, is a carrier of significance, a form through which we define the content of relations between the Self and the Other,” Fabian writes (Time x). For Blom’s photograph to authorize K’in Obregon as subject only within the time of the ruin as deadspace would thus threaten to reproduce what Fabian calls the ‘denial of coevalness’—the negation of shared time enacted in the process of constructing a culture as allochronistic, “from the Greek allos, for other or alien, and chronos, for time” (Gollnick 77). This denial produces a particular politics of time—one that affords the observing subject (the ethnographer, for example) the opportunity to claim a privileged temporality, far removed from the ‘primitive, ‘savage,’ ‘mythic,’ or ‘lost’ one of a cultural ‘Other.’ 42 Staging the possibility for multiple temporalities to meet and interact at Lacanjá thus not only deviates from the allochronism that Brian Gollnick argues has dominated ethnographic work on the Lacandon; it also interrogates the temporal privilege underlying the practice of cultural salvage that framed the group’s presence in the Mexican cultural imaginary and on an international anthropological stage.

In this way, Blom’s jumbling of lines and temporalities in her Lacanjá series carry implications that extend beyond the ‘ruined’ backdrop: the photographs subvert the image of the Lacandon as a “Stone Age” people and iconic ethnological remnant (Price 17). 43 In the standing shots, the alignment between K’in Obregon and the sizable tree growing from the ruins above and behind him problematizes Lacanjá’s role as a stand-in for the degradation of Mayan cultures or token of times past indicative of an inevitable trajectory of peoples like the Lacandon: K’in Obregon appears to provide the tree’s very base, designating the potential for not just nature, but a cultural life often thought dead to survive in such a site. Moreover, by placing the focal point of the Lacanjá series not so much in the building itself, but in K’in Obregon, dressed in a traditional Lacandon tunic and, in some of the most frequently reproduced shots, smoking a hearty puro of hand-rolled tobacco, Blom’s series challenges the Lacandon’s reputation along with influential allegories of the country’s indigenous populations. K’in Obregon appears as neither the romanticized, ahistorical and mystical “Indian [who] blends into the landscape. . .” featured in Octavio Paz’ famous rendering in the early pages of El laberinto de la soledad, or “The Living Fossil” Jesse Lerner argues dominates visual representations of Mexican indigenous subjects (“Images” 242).

Blom’s Lacanjá images interrogate these associations that threaten to distance and delimit the living, breathing indigenous subject within categories of the ‘natural’ (and cultureless) or remnant (alive in an ‘other’ time, now frozen). Temporality and who is positioned where within it emerges as a delightful tangle in these photographs as the series suggests an alternative politics of time that gives way to an alternative politics of

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42 See Fabian’s critique of anthropology in Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object in which he argues that this ‘denial of co-evalness’ buttresses ethnographers’ authority as ‘objective’ observers while also negating the intersubjective temporality necessitated by their practice. Even if Fabian’s critique centers around the practice of official anthropology, I reference his concepts here as useful for thinking about moments of cultural contact. For Fabian, time is a precious commodity, linked to economies of knowledge and power in and outside anthropology as a discipline—an idea that was fundamental to the critique of cultural anthropology raised in the 1980s most famously represented in texts like the Writing Cultures collection.

43 This descriptor of the Lacandon as “Stone Age” appears in both Christine Price’s Heir to the Ancient Maya and Harris’ Bearing Witness.

44 Roger Bartra has also described these in his introduction to Ojo de vidrio as “seres que se confuden con la naturaleza.”
photographically representing K’ìn Obregon as indigenous subject, as well. In the Lacanjá images, the Mayan ruins are not the only element remade as part of a visible ‘here and now;’ the series also features the photographed Mexican indigenous subject as contemporaneous and thus more than an anachronistic relic to be fixed and rescued in the ethno-photographer’s lens. The close-up shots of K’ìn Obregon crouching low and smoking in particular reveal a significant concern with textures and marks that intimate individuality and synchronicity. In them, K’ìn Obregon faces the camera head on, gaze steady, focused on the lens before him as he purses his lips as if ready to inhale. His hands drape towards the ground as he rests his elbows on his bent knees, making a casual yet seemingly conscious pose that conveys a sense of presence and awareness. The heavily chiaroscuro lighting in the shots contributes further by spotlighting elements of K’ìn Obregon’s body and dress that carry unique characteristics—the creases and folds in the fabric of his well-worn tunic, the veins that spread across the backs of the man’s hands, his face.  

More than a typified or anachronistic indigenous body in ruins, fixed on the photographer’s negative or emptied out of interiority, K’ìn Obregon imprints Blom’s images with a sense of the co-temporal and even inter-subjective nature of the photographic event with his posture and gaze. This breaks the photographs from certain precepts of anthropometric and ‘type’ photography in which, as Eli Bartra succinctly puts it, the “intention is not to photograph people because of who they are, but for what they do and what they represent” (220). It also opens up a politics of time that refuses to privilege the time of the viewer or ethno-photographer and invites multiple subjects and histories to meet and interact. Overall, Blom’s Lacanjá series almost toys with the allochronism Fabian critiques, focusing on the ruin and Lacandon man that initially would seem to welcome and replicate the ethnographer or archeologist’s position of temporal distance, then turning it on its head. In place of Fabian’s “denial of coevalness” and the subject/object division it facilitates, her photographs undercut the temporal privilege other practitioners exercised in the process of situating themselves as speaking, perceiving, present-tense subjects while relegating the Lacandon to the status of anachronistic cultural objects. The space of the ruin in the Lacanjá series is too alive to be a relic of something lost, and K’ìn Obregon, especially in his close-up, portrait-like image, stands irreducible to objectified indigenous ‘type’ that can be categorized. Instead, he holds a presence in the time and frame of the photograph difficult to deny, and the photograph itself features an aesthetic of overlap that highlights intersubjective and temporal points of contact, as well as photography’s potential to record these.

Interrogating Salvage Photographically: Picturing Cultural Production and Transmission at Yaxchilán

In refusing to authorize the ethno-photographer as the subject who fixes indigenous subjects on film in a way that primes them for the museum or the ethnographic store, many of Blom’s imágenes lacandonas fracture the foundations of the salvage mode that played such a crucial role in framing the Lacandon. In his study of how the Selva lacandona and its indigenous inhabitants have undergone a long string of inventions and reinventions by

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45 See Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans, edited by Lucy R. Lippard. Thinking about a set of portrait photographs of indigenous subjects in her introduction to the volume, Lippard suggests that the photographs’ ability to be converted into “mere inventory is undermined by the irreducible presence of a self. A face, a gesture, a place...” (16).
colonial historians, explorers, ethnographers, ecologists, novelists, and, more currently, indigenous-based social movements like *Zapatismo*, Brain Gollnick makes the case that Blom’s work reproduces the “allochronic formulation” Fabian critiques by alienating Lacandon subjects from visible markers of modern life (technology, dress, etc), thus feeding their reputation as the ethnological equivalent of the Mayan ruins ‘archeological adventurers’ like John L. Stephens depicted as “the monuments of a by-gone people” (44). Sustained by a sense of superiority to ‘save’ and decide the future of these presumed remnants, figures like Stephens turned ransacking ruins into “a cultural imperative,” Gollnick argues, increasing the reach of what Robert D. Aguirre writes about as ‘informal empire’—a kind of imperial expansion supplied by the acquisition of knowledge, especially antiquities and museum materials (Gollnick 45).

To read Blom’s photographs as a simple continuation of these practices glosses over how they cast a critical eye on what Blom characterized as a tradition of pillage started by the nineteenth-century scientists and foreign explorers whom she branded the ‘busca-tesoros’—the treasure-seekers; it also overlooks how many of her images give way to a more nuanced reading of the living histories and dialogical processes of cultural articulation and production concealed behind a salvage approach. Building on themes visible in the Lacanjá series, the surviving images of Chan K’in Viejo and his son’s visit to Yaxchilán seem to turn on this central concern. In them, Blom locates Yaxchilán within a specific history, then creates an interplay between setting and subjects that considers the implications allochronizing practices carry in their archeological and ethnological expressions. In 1882, Yaxchilán’s story came to reflect the very drive to uncover and recover ‘lost’ cultures that preoccupies Blom’s series, as Frenchman Desiré Charnay and British botanist Alfred Percival Maudslay spent months scurrying through the selva to be the first to locate this city-in-ruins thought to be brimming with buried Mayan treasures. Immediately after Maudslay won (if only by two days), both men began extensive excavation efforts there to extract and ‘save’ Mayan stelea, glyphs, and carved stones, many of which made their way across oceans to form part of European and North American museum collections. (Multiple pieces taken from Yaxchilán continue to be housed in the British Museum as part of one of the world’s largest Pre-Columbian collections.) Maudslay reproduced a photograph from a similar expedition in his monumental book *Biologia Centrali-Americana* (1889-1902) that epitomizes this manifestation of salvage that Blom’s photos counter: Maudslay is pictured atop the mostly-excavated tower of a Mayan “palace” dressed in white. Numerous men with pickaxes and shovels work below, but the photo’s distanced, panoramic-like perspective attempts to encompass the expanse of ruins uncovered, emphasizing the long rows of archways and carved pillars that extend beyond both the left and right boundaries of the photographic frame. In his perch above it all, with his hand on his hip and commanding stance, Maudslay gives the authoritative air of a conqueror.

Blom’s Yaxchilán series speaks to the epistemological legacy of this history and its impact on the study of indigenous cultures in the region, portraying the joint journey she takes with Chan K’in Viejo and his son as one that opposes a narrative of *busca-tesoros*. James

46 Aguirre’s study connects nineteenth-century British colonialism to “informal” imperial expansion via the acquisition of antiquities by institutions like the British Museum. See Gollnick’s overview in *Reinventing the Lacandon* (42-45).
47 See *La selva lacandona* (78).
Clifford’s work has frequently revisited the way in which the salvage mode or paradigm, whether applied to ruins or cultures, is predicated upon “collectors, conservators, and scientists” like Maudslay assuming the authority to preserve what would otherwise be “doomed,” and Blom’s Yaxchilan photographs record scenes that complicate this hierarchy (Routes 211). The first photograph that shows Chan K’in Viejo and his son scaling the hill to the Hachäkyum temple focuses on the central site of archeological interest at Yaxchilán, yet it reverses the politics of salvage that Maudslay proudly puts on display and the potential for the ethno-photographer to mimic similar tendencies in relationship to her subjects. Much like Lacanjá, the Hachäkyum temple figures in this photo as more than a site of loss that needs to be recovered and preserved, and the photographed subjects’ active role as more than auxiliaries to a collector’s pursuits is key to illustrating this. Chan K’in Viejo and his son’s engagement in the scene negates an atmosphere of impending doom; the temple has a contemporary use-value, the image implies, but a value not determined by a ‘specialist’ who unearths, extracts, and ‘rescues.’ Instead, in Blom’s photo, the two men who visit the temple are shown in the process of negotiating a relationship to the site and to each other that the ethno-photographer cannot render legible and claim. Whereas Maudslay’s photograph pictures all other subjects as subordinate to the ‘discoverer’s’ intentions (the indigenous workers appear literally in a position of alterity on the ground below), Blom’s photograph employs a horizontal point of view that invites the possibility of collaboration, disrupting the extract-collect-preserve model of knowledge and, along with it, the ethno-photographer’s position of authority.

This implicit critique of salvage as saqueo alongside a concern with photography’s participation in furthering it vis-à-vis indigenous subjects preoccupies the remaining photos Blom takes that same day at Yaxchilán, many of which introduce a decapitated stone stela as a cue for the effects of approaching Lacandon subjects as if ethnographic objects to be pillaged and preserved like the archeological objects taken from the ruins. As the photographs follow Chan K’in Viejo and his son’s activities, from burning copal to conversing on the steps of Hachäkyum, the headless stela guards the center doorway to the temple and features prominently in Blom’s shots. Stories conflict about who broke the statue and when (some accuse careless archeologists, others a drunken band of mahogany-loggers), but in one photograph in particular, the stela functions in terms of a disrupted semblance between statue and Lacandon subject—a kind of inversion of the central conceit found in images like Álvarez Bravo’s Mayan Boy of Tulum.

Bravo’s image set up an aesthetic of equivalence, presenting the photographed indigenous subject as ethnological relic by shooting the boy’s profile like a pure echo of the Tulum relief, but Blom’s photograph assumes an oblique angle, both photographically and

49 “[A] powerful tradition of collecting in the salvage mode has long been justified by the idea that authentic tribal productions are doomed: their future can only be either local destruction or preservation in the hands of knowing collectors, conservators, and scientists” (Routes 211).

50 This photograph is reproduced in Imágenes lacandonas, as well as Christine Price’s experimental part-ethnography, part-history Heirs of the Ancient Maya opposite a page of text describing the journey to the temple.

51 This upset is notable in Blom’s work overall. In the early photographs she takes of women who fought in Zapata’s army, she often positions her camera below, looking up at the subjects. This choice is worth considering in light of what Mraz calls Sekula’s take on subalternity and point of view. He describes “la tendencia de fotógrafos documentales profesionales de apuntar sus cameras hacia abajo, hacia ellos, con poco poder o prestigio” (Nacho López 69). Mraz has argued that, even as indigenous subjects begin to emerge as “sujetos e individuos activos” in the work of Mexican photographers like Julio de la Fuente in the 20th century, these photographs still reflect a domesticating tendency.
ideologically speaking. Blom’s shot is slanted so that the decapitated statue appears mid-frame and forefront, while Chan K’in Viejo’s son sits directly next to it, in between his father and the stone. With his knees up and elbow lifted in a triangular bend, the son replicates the contours of the decapitated statue’s silhouette, making the image seem to signal likeness at the outset. This allows for a sense of connection or continuity that counters the narrative of the disappeared Maya by pointing to a contemporary indigenous presence. But this also stands in tandem with the fact that the formal similarities between stela and Lacandon man are initially visible yet notably incomplete. The son’s white tunic and the dark stone of the statue oppose one another, contributing visual contrast, and the fact that the statue is headless suggests the image’s larger import in terms of visual configurations of Mexican indigeneity and how they figured within national and scientific imaginaries. To treat one like the other, to convert Lacandon subject into object or relic, the photograph seems to imply, would involve an epistemic violence whose effects could equate decapitation.

Blom’s Yaxchilán images work against the tendency to reify cultures as objects of study and gesture toward the possibility for photographs to acknowledge and reflect on indigenous ways of articulating and expressing cultural knowledge. Her series favors scenes of production and transmission—ones that highlight Chan K’in Viejo and his son as cultural actors. In the first photograph of the series process (versus stasis) is implied by the subjects’ movement within a scene depicting travel; Chan K’in Viejo and his son are shown in the midst of making a journey, and the slight blurs of movement by their legs function like gerunds of the photographic medium. One later photo of the two men beside the decapitated stela adds to this by conveying a sense of meaning in movement, of dynamic culture rather than entropic indigeneity whose ‘survival’ depends on being fixed and preserved in the ethnophotographer’s images. In it, Chan K’in Viejo leans toward the ground and appears to be tracing something with his right index finger. His open mouth and expressive brows suggest speech and, since he’s not without an audience, perhaps communication, too. The son beside him braces his seated frame against the mottled wall of the temple behind, looking forward and slightly down pensively, as if listening to his father, while other images show the son observing, then joining in on what seems to be a ritual performance of the incense-burning ceremony to the creator-god Hachäkyum that Blom frequently described in her notes and correspondence. Chan K’in Viejo sits cross-legged facing the temple’s outer wall in these shots, sometimes holding a tree branch in his clasped hands or bowing his head while his son watches or accompanies him. Although we can only conjecture as to the scenes’ order or the intervals of time between them, overall the sequence brings focus to living cultural practices and their active continuation, even transmission, from one generation to the next.

This emphasis on the mobility of meaning and bodies imparts the Yaxchilán series with a present-tense using a different visual register than the Lacanjá images, but it introduces what Clifford might describe as a “present-becoming-future” that offsets core assumptions underlying the ethnographic or anthropological practice of salvage as applied to groups like the Lacandon. In his essay “The Others: Beyond the ‘Salvage’ Paradigm,” Clifford relates the story of a painted Native American animal skin that moved from the curios cabinet of a lone collector to the Musée de l’Homme, where it was de-coded ethnographically for its graphic style and ceremonial function. When the tunic received an unexpected visitor—a grandson in search of a similar article that his grandfather had been forced to sell—the tunic becomes incorporated into a narrative and meaning-making process that severs it from the realm of salvage, however. The tunic, “formerly beautiful and interesting but passive and indifferent, little by little became meaningful. . . through the mediation of someone who did not observe
and analyze but who lived the object and for whom the object lived. It scarcely matters whether the tunic is really his grandfather’s” (“Others” 75).

For Clifford, this anecdote underscores the potential for ‘tribal artifacts’ acquired as symbolic capital in Western museum collections to have multiple histories, but on a larger scale it represents the potential to disrupt a salvage paradigm that assumes a ‘hot’/‘cold’ opposition between Western cultures and those envisioned as unable to produce culture—those “tied to inherited structures that either resist or yield to the new” but are deemed unable to create it (“Others” 74). In Clifford’s analysis, engagement and production, not rescue or preservation, are invoked by the grandson’s connection with the tunic since his narration invites simultaneity (not Fabian’s distanced time) and refuses a rhetoric of objectivity or recapture in relationship to a ‘lost’ cultural truth (“It scarcely matters whether the tunic is really his grandfather’s”). Instead, “the old painted tunic becomes newly, traditionally meaningful in the context of present-becoming-future” Clifford argues, and in the process, ruptures visions of recovered authenticity, stable cultural wholes, and anthropological hubris on which the salvage paradigm depends.

In recording scenes of Chan K’in Viejo and his son’s participation in generating a similar “present-becoming-future,” Blom’s Yaxchilán series invokes what we might think of as a photographic parallel to what Clifford describes. Like the grandson who narrates, the two subjects in the Yaxchilán series imprint the photographic negative with presence and movement, articulating and creating where a static, Lacandon culture in need of ‘rescue’ was assumed to be, and authorizing a uniquely photographic alternative to models of anthropological recovery and the underlying assumptions Clifford points to. In them, Chan K’in Viejo and his son not only signify a life that visions of Mexican indigeneity as ruin efface; they also participate in expressing, producing, and transmitting cultural knowledge independent of the anthropologist or curator’s salvage approach (and, to remember Fabian, the temporal privilege on which it depends).

Multiple flows of knowledge come into play in moments like these, Blom’s Yaxchilán series shows, as it embraces the ethno-photographic event as one that entails layers of parallel practices—the kind of “constructive negotiation” prioritizes that involves a plurality of “conscious, politically significant subjects” and proposes an alternative to a salvage approach to culture (Predicaments 41). The Yaxchilán images are sprinkled with reminders of the various parties who collaborate in creating the photographic events thought to fix indigenous cultures and subjects on film and on the ‘cold’ side of cultural production. In what was most likely a photographic accident visible in some undeveloped shots from the series, a flash of someone’s tall leather boots, rugged clothing, and shoulder jut into the frame from the left—a mark left by an observer who accompanies Blom in witnessing the ritual Chan K’in Viejo and his son perform. Creating a kind of frame-within-a-frame effect, this incomplete presence infers what the photograph leaves only partially visible or outside the frame—the interplay between presence and absence and even the unseen ethno-photographer’s role in witnessing, recording, and producing these photographic portrayals of the ‘dying’ Lacandon ritual that anthropologists like Tozzer and Soustelle cited as proof of the Lacandon’s decline.

In the same frame, however, the presumed objects of Blom’s ‘fixing’ practice act as simultaneous, constructive parties whose active presence gets ‘let in’ and registered on the

52 Clifford takes this quote from museum curator Anne Vitart-Fardoulis’ article describing the meeting.
53 Here we might also consider Michel de Certeau’s emphasis on “a plurality of authors and contracting parties” in historiography (Heterologies 217).
photographic negatives. Chan K’in Viejo and his son produce, perform, and transmit cultural knowledge alongside the ethno-photographer’s practice, which shatters their standing as examples of indigenous ruin and circumvents the ethno-photographer’s authority to ‘salvage’ them. This shifts the ethno-photographer’s entitlement of salvage to the periphery, as her practice becomes one of many, rather than an exclusive or dominant mode. It also changes the significance of ethno-photography. In place of visual documents that fix cultural specimens and further the production and circulation of Lacandon culture as ruin in need of rescue, the Yaxchilán photographs suggest that the ethno-photographer and her subjects not only inhabit a shared temporality and take active part in producing culture (not just preserving it), but they also collaborate in imprinting what gets traced in light and registered on the photographic negative. More than extending an ‘intención museográfica’ that reduces indigenous subjects and cultures to the level of specimens suspended in a present-becoming-past as static, legible objects of knowledge, ethno-photographs can carry the imprints of bodies and lifeways that pulsate with a present-becoming-future and even highlight photography’s dynamic and dialogical elements.

Revisiting *La fotografía del México indio*

Mexican photographer Nacho López, Blom’s contemporary and a key mid-century photojournalist who worked extensively with the *Instituto Nacional Indígena*, once wrote that the act of taking a photograph had the potential to activate “un enlace de amistad”—a tie or bond of friendship—that could alter the way we conceptualize the dynamic between Mexican indigenous subjects and the photographers who ‘shoot’ them. In his 1978 article “El indio en la fotografía,” López criticized the “fotógrafo-turista . . . [quien] dispara su cámara como rifle sin ninguna consideración” (In *Nacho López*, 76). In the midst of a growing self-reflexive turn about the ethics built into the distanced, scientifically inflected perspective that had marked photographic practice in Mexico, he preferred a metaphor that could convey the highly relational nature of the photographic event. “El indio en la fotografía,” he proposed, need not be envisioned as hunted prey, rendered powerless by the photographic apparatus or the person behind it. Instead, López hints at the power of photography to change the terms of social interactions and produce connections akin to friendships. Photographs involved in portraying some aspect of what it means to be ‘indio’ function as evidence, he implies, but not evidence in the sense of ‘objective’ data in the service of categorizing, taxonomizing hierarchies of knowledge, but rather, evidence of something shared, a bond between photographer and photographed that, even if made in one instant when a camera’s shutter flies open before snapping closed again, lingers within the photograph as a reminder of the *enlace* that both produced it and was born from it. Photography, López implies, can be a technology of openness.

López’ model, with its implications of humanity and warmth, maybe moves to the far opposite extreme of Bartra’s *fotodermista*, which conjures up little more than desiccated, indigenous bodies, gutted and converted into photographic specimens. But, like Gertrude Blom’s Lacanjá and Yaxchilán photographs, the idea that the photographic event constitutes and creates opportunities for *enlace* opens up a space for re-thinking the photographs that make up *la fotografía del México indio* and intervening in the debates that these same images generate: How can we reconceptualize the dynamic between ethno-photographer and subject,

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54 See Segre on this self-reflexive turn.
between indigenous subjects and photography? How does the process of production and particularity of photographs interrogate how Mexican indigeneity has been constructed and imagined (scientifically, anthropologically, nationally)? Without overlooking the historical potency of photography’s ‘truth value’ and the politics built into its ‘fixing’ function, what gets saved or salvaged in a photograph that can challenge us to see ethno-photographs as more than records of violence?

If photography has proved conveniently suited for the cold and classificatory work of the fotodermista, the visual politics explored in Gertrude Blom’s *Imágenes lacandonas* invites a rereading that marks the possibility for photographs—even those touched by ethnographic intention or mode—to hold what Elizabeth Edwards has termed “raw and submerged” histories that “allow for the possibility of subject experience” and provide a “counterpoint to the forensic” (19, 256, 87). Breaking photography away from cataloguing the ‘indio mexicano’ as a series of lifeless anthropometric, racial, and ethnic types thought to embody a visual record of truth is a struggle made manifest in images like Blom’s photographs at the Hachäkyum temple and Lacanjá. At a cultural moment in Mexico when salvaging indigenous lifeways and securing records of ‘dying’ cultures like the Lacandon was envisioned as a means of intervening in histories of conquest, invisibility, and marginalization, photographs like these suggest not only an alternative to the disembodied, disembodying eye of the fotodermista, but also to the emphasis on photograph’s indexical function. Space, light, time. All these emerge as shared in these photographs, which in turn re-figures the ethno-photographic event as a complex series of contact points and productive exchanges that stands to alter how we think about photography’s relationship to the ‘real’ and its role in practices of cultural salvage.
Chapter Two

O etnógrafo aprendiz: The Ethnographer as Apprentice in Mário de Andrade’s O turista aprendiz

The opening entry of Mário de Andrade’s unfinished, experimental travelogue O turista aprendiz paints the portrait of a traveler on the verge of breakdown. After declaring his preface “mais avertência que prefácio” (“more a warning than a preface”) and begging readers for “paciência,” the often apologetic, acutely self-aware narrator describes tackling last-minute preparations for a trip from São Paulo to the Amazons—the first of two journeys that he recounts in fragmented, diary-like entries (49). Andrade depicts his departure from his hometown as an admittedly frantic affair. He finds himself so distracted by the need to “mostrar calma”—to show or even feign calm—that he nearly misses his trip before it can begin (51). He rushes to leave for the train station on time, forgets luggage at home, turns back to retrieve it, arrives at the platform with barely five minutes to spare, and then struggles to obligingly go through the motions when saying goodbye to the friends who have come to see him off. He confesses to feeling on-edge and conflicted, bothered by the paradoxical “vazio compacto” (“compact emptiness”) he feels in his core, while his friends linger on the platform, hugging him and shouting trivialities like “Boa-Viagem”—“Happy travels”—and “Traga um jacaré”—“Bring back an alligator!” (Turista 51). All this leads Andrade to exclaim, with a mixture of good-humor and frustration, a phrase that will emerge as one of his travelogue’s central, if ironic, refrains: “Não fui feito para viajar, bolas!”—“I wasn’t made to travel, dammit!” (Turista 51).

But travel Mário does. One of the few Brazilian modernistas to never visit Europe, he forecloses on Paris in favor of travelling vast expanses of Brazil, spending much of 1927-1950 writing and collecting folklore, music, and ethnographic material. In 1927, he travels by boat along the twists of a river in the interior into the Amazons and the borderlands with Peru and Bolivia. Later, in 1928, he travels by land through the Brazilian Nordeste—the Northeast region that appears on maps like a patchwork of almost contradictory landscapes. There, he traverses coastal towns like Recife and Natal, then the arid, sparsely-populated sertão, with the express purpose of penning a column for São Paulo’s Diário nacional about his travels and

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1 All translations of passages from O turista aprendiz are my own. As is common in Brazil, I refer to Mário de Andrade by his first name in this chapter. Although never realized in publication, one of Mário’s lifelong projects consisted of compiling a ‘Gramatiquinha da fala brasileira’ (Little Grammar Handbook of ‘Brasilianisms’), and his desire to write in ‘Brazilian’ and move away from the rules and sounds of Peninsular Portuguese mark the orthography, rhythm, and grammar of O turista aprendiz. I replicate these idiosyncrasies when quoting from the text and attempt to account for them, whenever possible, in the translations I provide. I avoid using the ‘sic’ mark since it traditionally implies error more than creative rendering.

2 The fact that Mário chose to travel Brazil over Europe suggests a move to privilege Brazil’s popular culture over Europe’s ‘erudite’ one, as Mário often calls it in Turista aprendiz. One article from 1929 promoting Mário’s work in the Brazilian Northeast paints Mário’s chosen itinerary as an expression of his commitment to “nossas coisas” (In Turista 378). “Mário de Andrade, podendo ir á Europa, preferiu vir em excursão ao nordeste, onde colheu diretamente mais de oitocentos temas musicais” (In Turista 377).
researching regional music and Afro-Brazilian candomblé ceremonies.² Relaying short texts to the newspaper via telegraph while still on the road, Mário publishes parts of his travel journals as a series of columns under the heading *O turista aprendiz*—The Apprentice Tourist—sometimes accompanied by a photograph or two. Upon returning to São Paulo, he begins reshaping the journals into an experimental “livro de viagens”—an unfinished project that he works on sporadically until his death in 1945 (Lopez 19). He compiles the text into what he characterizes as a half-written “conjunto”—a gathering—of photographs, “cadernos e papéis soltos, ora mais, ora menos escrito” (“notebooks and loose sheets of paper, more or less written”), which he stores along with a handwritten title page. The page, reproduced in the text posthumously published in 1976, features a sketch depicting America as a young woman wearing a small crown and announces the playful title that Mário gave the unrealized book project: *O turista aprendiz* (Viagem pelo Amazonas até Perú, pelo Madeira até a Bolívia e por Maragó até dizer chega) — The Apprentice Tourist (Journey through the Amazon to Peru, by way of the Madeira to Bolivia and through Maragó until saying enough) (49).

On this *turista’s* journeys from what he describes as one of Brazil’s premiere metropolitan centers to his far-off destinations, Mário’s pen and his uncertainty about whether he is equipped for the tasks at hand serve as constant companions. Mário paints himself as a scattered, inexperienced traveler in the opening sequence of *O turista aprendiz*, yet not being “feito pra viajar”—made to travel—yields a key limitation or deficiency that he frequently contemplates in the pages that follow. Initially a pivotal term to describe the kind of travel practice he looks to negotiate, *aprendiz*—apprentice or novice—develops into a pivotal concept for Mário’s ethnographic practice as well. While the first half of *O turista aprendiz* probes the epistemological quandaries of using the travelling self as an instrument for gathering and producing knowledge about the peoples and places that he encounters on his travels, in the second half subtitled “Viagem etnográfica” (Ethnographic Journey), Mário locates in the *aprendiz* subject-position an alternative model of self for the ethnographer practicing in the field. Ever-critical of ethnography as a process of knowledge-acquisition that centers on employing the self as an instrument of knowing, he explores an alternative by way of fashioning himself as *etnógrafo aprendiz*—an ever-novice ethnographer who rejects presumptions of mastery by claiming a position associated with lack of knowledge and expertise, as well as vulnerability and receptivity.

**Writing with a Walking Stick: The *Etnógrafo aprendiz* Sets Out**

The *aprendiz* title Mário seeks to claim, both for himself and for his text, might strike some as strangely modest coming from the prominent musicologist and poet, ‘pope’ of Brazilian modernismo,⁵ and author of the landmark novel *Macunáma* (1928).⁶ But if Mário

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³ A few of these crônicas were also published in the *Revista Acadêmica*. (See *Turista* 90, for example.) Some entries also appear in *Os filhos da Candinha*, an anthology, and *Na pancada do ganzá*. *Na pancada*, which Mário begins preparing in manuscript form in 1954, relies heavily on the research he conducts in the Nordeste.

⁴ See Têle Ancona Lopez’ account of turning the gathering of materials into a text published with the first edition.

⁵ Mário’s writings suggest he maintained a notably ambivalent relationship with the modernista avant-garde movement he supposedly ‘ordained.’ Brazilian modernismo and the modernista movements identified with other parts of Latin America differ significantly (9). For a look at how these diverge but also occasionally overlap in the cases of Mexico and Brazil, see Esther Gabara’s *Errant Modernism*. Gabara’s text represents one of the few scholarly publications on *O turista aprendiz* and gives special attention to the photographs Mário took on these trips.
looks to fashion himself as aprendiz, he worries throughout his travelogue that the turista model more familiar to him might win out. In the opening entry, Mário fashions himself as inexperienced and uncertain, but he is hardly a newcomer to travel when he sets out for the Amazons in 1927. His “viagem grandota” (“grand journey”), as he calls it in a letter penned about a month before he leaves São Paulo, follows a trip that Mário took to the state of Minas Gerais with writer Oswald de Andrade, painter Tarsila do Amaral, the French surrealist poet Blaise Cendrars,7 and a “caravana” (“caravan”) of travelers—mostly Brazilians themselves—on what the group collectively called a “viagem da descoberta do Brasil”—a Brazil-discovery trip (Branco 15, Lopez 16). They timed the visit to coincide with the traditional Quaresma and Semana Santa (Holy Week) festivals and gave it ethnographic undertones as they described themselves as metropolitan intellectuals making their first contact with the regional “povo” of Brazil’s interior (Lopez 16). Envisioning an opportunity to break from imported European aesthetics in part by gathering source material from previously ‘undiscovered’ places like Minas, these travelers thus painted their trip like an expedition with an aesthetic takeaway.

In this sense, what Carlos Heitor Castello Branco calls “a primeira viagem turística de brasileiros, no Brasil” (“the first touristic trip by Brazilians in Brazil”) dovetails the modernistas’ investment in working to reenvision a national culture by looking to parts of the country that seemed ‘new’ to them, raising questions about the relationship between modernista intellectuals and what scholars like Lúcia Sá write about as their search for “popular, and often nonurban, Brazilian culture,” as well as their fascination with indigenous peoples like the Tupi (Branco 16, Sá 36).8 While they traveled to places like Minas to ‘discover’ their own land, many modernistas also looked to accounts penned by European explorers and visitors to glean ethnographic insight into the lifeways of groups like the Tupi. The antropófago group of modernists (of which Mário was an early member) took up the Tupi cannibal ritual as a

6 Macunaima incorporated years of Mário’s research on Brazilian folklore, music, and linguistics, but its main intertext was a series of studies by German naturalist-ethnographer Theodor Koch-Grünenberg, who published numerous volumes on Brazil between 1916 and 1924. See the first chapter of Lúcia Sá’s Rain Forest Literatures for an analysis of the narratives Koch-Grünenberg collected, plus Sá’s second chapter and Ivan Cavalcanti Proença’s Roteiro de Macunaima (1955) for a detailed account of how Mário gleaned—some even say cannibalized—tales and characters from Koch-Grünenberg’s work, only to mix and recreate these alongside numerous other source texts in the process of writing Macunaima. The relationship between the two texts was so close that Mário was accused of plagiarism—a charge he readily accepted, writing in 1931 in the Diário Nacional: “What shocks me... is that my detractors forgot all they know, restricting my copying to Koch-Grünenberg, when I copied them all... You really want to know? Not only did I copy the ethnographers and the Amerindian texts, but further... I took whole sentences from Rui Barbosa, Mário Barreto, and the Portuguese colonial chroniclers, and I tore apart the ever so precious and solemn language used by the contributors to the Revista da Língua Portuguesa” (in Sá 39). On interactions between Macunaima and O turista aprendiz, see the first two chapters of Gabara’s Errant Modernism.

7 On Cendrars’ travels in Brazil, see Alexandre Eulálio’s A aventura brasileira de Blaise Cendrars.

8 See Lúcia Sá and Luís Madureira for two recent readings of the Tupi’s role in the Brazilian modernista imaginary. For Sá, the Tupi represent the focal, indigenous component of Brazilian modernismo, as encapsulated in Oswald de Andrade’s famous quote, “Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question”—a statement that Sá reads as subverting both Shakespearean and Brazilian discourse by recasting Joaquim Nabuco’s motto “We are Brazilians, not Guaranis,” in Shakespearean English (141). Sá fits modernismo’s evocation of the Tupi within national discourses about indigeneity and identity, reading the second phase of São Paulo modernismo as shifting the movement’s focus from the city to “non-urban popular culture; several writers and artists looked deeper, towards indigenous cultures, thereby taking up the discussion about Brazilian identity where the [nineteenth-century] Indianismo had left it” (138). In contrast, Madureira reads the role of the Tupi in primitivist terms. See Cannibal Modernismo. On questions of nativism and primitivism in Mário’s work, see also Silviano Santiago The Space In-Between: Essays in Latin American Culture.
resistant post-colonial posture and planned to fill the shelves of the bibliotequinha antropofágica (the little anthropophagite library) they were compiling with an assemblage penned by foreigners about their own supposed discoveries in Brazil. They envisioned writings by colonial travelers Jean de Léry, André Thevet, and Hans Staden sitting alongside Mário’s own Macunaíma and other prominent modernista texts, as well as ethnographic and naturalist studies conducted in Brazil (Koch-Grünberg, for instance), and collections of native texts like Couto de Magalhães’s O Selvagem.

The bibliotequinha never materialized, and Mário later would break ties with the antropófago group, as well as most of the artists and intellectuals who had taken part in the trip to Minas (Lopez 16). Yet the viagem de descoberta approach mapped onto practices of writing and reading about travel in Brazil that extend beyond the Minas trip and find an important interlocutor in O turista aprendiz. If the modernistas took much of their knowledge about Brazil’s lands and indigenous cultures from the writings of travelers and naturalist explorers, Mário seems keen to parody these kinds of texts in the protracted title that he gives O turista aprendiz.9 His playful phrase “até dizer chega” (“until saying enough” or “until saying ‘we’ve arrived’”), for example, adds a twist to a title that Esther Gabara reads as a reference to Mário’s “inherited genre of the travel narrative” and one that, in conversation with his sketch of America’s face, frames his travelogue with a self-reflexive intention to “lay[ ] bare his invention of America” (38).10 But by foregrounding the labor of representation-invention at work in his own writings from the onset, Mário takes up questions about the aim to discover, know, and write about Brazil—a Brazil presumably tucked away in the country’s rural corners and the writings of ethnographers and colonial chroniclers. In the journals he keeps of his travels through the Amazons and Northeast, he claims to write “com a menor intenção de dar a conhecer aos outros a terra viajada” (“with not the least intention of making known to others the lands I traveled”), eschewing what he frames as touristic postures and discourses of discovery (my emphasis 49).

By constructing himself as a writer who does not intend to make his “terra viajada” known, Mário thus ruptures the viagem de descoberta approach but also interrogates his role as the narrator of a travelogue and a researcher poised to embark on a viagem etnográfica.11 If scholars like Mary Louise Pratt and Michel de Certeau show that writers of travelogues and ethnographic texts similarly invest in producing discourses of power—discourses premised upon claims to discover and represent the peoples and places they encounter (and thus construct them as knowable)—Mário foregrounds his inability, or unwillingness, to inhabit this

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9 See Sá on the antropófagos and their bibliotequinha.
10 Gabara’s reading of the hand-sketched portrait of America that Mário uses to decorate his title page positions the sketch in opposition to works like Stradanus’ engravings of Amerigo Vespucci ‘discovering’ America, suggesting that Mário’s sketch represents a counter-comment on connections between visuality and discourses of discovery. For a reading of Stradanus’ engravings as “playful allegory” that problematizes ways of reading the nakedness of America, see José Rabasa Inventing America (50). If the sketch foregrounds the ways in which Mário sees himself as engaging in his own exercise in inventing America—as feminine, as having indigenous features, etc—then he also suggests that the exercise works against what I have been discussing as knowability. By sketching America in a way that feminizes the continent yet leaves her body out of view, Mário might be read as working against what Michel de Certeau describes as “orgiastic curiosity”—an obsession with unveiling and connecting knowledge to “what the eye is allowed to see” (Writing 234). And yet, parts of Turista aprendiz problematize not only what is visible or made available for discovery and consumption, but also the subject’s ability to see at all. Mário, in a fascinating inversion that Gabara somehow misses, often describes himself as a veil. (See Turista 233 for example.)
11 On ethnographers as tourists, see Malcolm Crick.
subject-position. Unsettling his own epistemological privilege from the start, he presents himself as an inarticulate, disoriented traveler who can barely make the train on time, while declaring outright that his role is not to dar a conhecer—that is, to pass knowledge along to readers. Throughout his journals, he will repeatedly return to the fact that he is unable to know or narrate for readers the “terra” he traverses: “estou um bocado aturdido”—“I’m a stunned mouth,” he says when trying to describe his time travelling through a series of towns along the northeastern coast of Brazil (Turista 60). In moments like these, Mário constructs himself as a writer-traveler who is rendered speechless and dislocated through the experience of travel, but also one who is unwilling to ground himself and readers in the purported knowability of the people and places he encounters, let alone his ability to know or represent them in writing.13

In O turista aprendiz, self/other, here/there, center-margin, insider/outsider divisions that might ease a knowing process prove useless to the narrator from the start. As Mário describes it, the São Paulo train platform does not ground him in a home or in Brazil’s beacon of metropolitan modernity—its ‘city of the future,’ as it was commonly known at the time. Instead, it represents a shaky point of enunciation for Mário’s turista, at best. From page one, São Paulo hardly appears as a fixed, stable point on the horizon—a ‘here’ that makes sense and grounds the traveler’s ability to produce a foreign ‘there’ through writing and ethnography. Instead, Mário’s hometown appears as a site of uncertainty and incoherence, a boundary-space where the narrator is already out of place and uneasy with mastery and making meaning. From ‘here,’ the narrator announces that he is not “feito pra viajar”—made to travel. From ‘here,’ he emphasizes that he begins his journey plagued by lack—lack of ease, lack of knowledge and experience—but lack that, as time and text go on, the narrator seeks to cultivate, more than overcome or fill.

How to negotiate, even inhabit, these tensions quickly emerges as one of the founding concerns of not only Mário’s sprawling, never-published “livro de viagens,” but the aprendiz praxis it works to articulate (Lopez 19). With the departure sequence, the text marks the beginning of a process of destabilizing the traveler-ethnographer’s footing in discourses of discovery, extraction, and accumulation. As Mário recounts the chaos and uncertainty of getting out the door and on the train, he also conveys his intent to travel and write in a way that he hopes will represent a departure from the proverbial models, especially those he inherits from traditional ethnography and foreigners’ accounts of the ‘new’ world: “Sei bem

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12 On intersections between travel writing and ethnography as discourses of power, see Mary Louise Pratt’s seminal work Imperial Eyes, as well essays by Michel de Certeau including “Montaigne’s ‘Of Cannibals’: The Savage ‘I’” and “Ethno-graphy: Speech, or the Space of the Other” (discussed later in this chapter). For a general look at the development of travel writing as a genre and field of inquiry see Mary Blaine Campbell’s “Travel Writing and its theory.” On the genre’s importance in the Americas specifically, see the essays collected in New World Encounters, edited by Stephen Greenblatt.

13 On travel as an experience of dislocation, see Claude Lévi-Strauss’ Tristes Tropiques.

14 See Sá’s Rainforest Literatures: “The first years of modernista literature (1922-24) were characterized by a celebration of urban modernity, epitomized in most cases by the city of São Paulo.” (35)

15 Although beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail, it seems that Mário thus problematizes issues about the ‘modern’ city as the key site for the Latin American avant-garde. See generally, Jean Franco’s The Modern Culture of Latin America, Vicky Unruh’s Latin American Vanguard, and on Brazil, Luís Madureira’s Cannibal Modernities.

16 Mário uses this phrase to describe the project in a newspaper interview shortly after he returns from the Amazons. The exact date of the interview is unclear. See Telê Porto Ancona Lopez’ “Viagens Etnográficas’ de Mário de Andrade.”
que esta viagem que vamos fazer não tem nada de aventura nem perigo," Mário writes while setting the scene for his dash to the train station (51). ("I know quite well that this trip we are going to take has no element of adventure or danger.") Just as soon as he asserts what he "know[s] well" ("Sei bem"), however, this confidence comes into conflict with what he knows from books. Other travelers’ accounts threaten to prefigure his own experience, he concedes, by supplying his imagination with a set of stock images—and subsequent models of travel and encounter—that he cannot seem to shake: “As reminiscências de leitura me impulsionaram mais que a verdade, tribos selvagens, jacarés e formigões,” he writes, charactering himself as compelled to conceive of his destination, and its inhabitants, as wild and dangerous (51). ("Memories of what I’ve read drove me more than the truth, wild tribes, alligators, and enormous ants.") This sense of the potential perils that await, though more fantastic than real, spurs Mário to mentally run through a list of objects he could carry for self-defense: “E a minha alminha santa imaginou: canhão, revolver, bengala, canivete. E opinou pela bengala” (51). ("And my holy little soul imagined: cannon, revolver, walking-stick, pocket-knife. And it opted for the walking-stick.")

In seeming contrast with the unstable narrator who can barely maintain his composure on the train platform, Mário appears astute and decisive when he describes opting for the walking stick as the choice companion for his travels—he is well-read, self-aware, and poetic, capable of synthesizing a spectrum of approaches to travel and cultural encounter into a short, cadenced list of objects that functions as a microhistory. Dominated by weapons, the list accentuates travel’s often violent effects, suggesting the results when cultures meet in what Mary Louise Pratt famously calls contact zones—"spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (Imperial Eyes 3). With its unavoidable military association, the canhão suggests battles, conquest, and the violence of the Brazilian state visible in histories of travel in Brazil, particularly the regions Mário visits (logging and rubber-farming in the Amazons, wars along the contested borders with Perú, for example).17 The smaller, handheld revolver and pocket-knife also stand out for their primary use as instruments for exacting violence: both are concealed objects that conjure up images of the audacious explorers and fortune-hunters of centuries prior who branded travel an experience of acquisition and risk—a battle to best the aventura and perigo they met in distant, foreign lands. Even if we think of the pocket-knife as the least extreme ‘weapon’ listed, all three objects define the traveler who carries them, Mário implies. They identify him or her with wariness, with a fear that dictates the need for protection (and domination) in the face of encounter with the unknown. In this way, the objects correspond to approaches to travel and the encounter marked by violence, both physical and epistemic; they also double to convey a prototype of the traveler as someone who must anticipate and safeguard against the danger of contact. The travelling self here is literally on-guard and inclined to violence and control.

The walking-stick the narrator chooses noticeably stands out on Mário’s list, and not only because of its relative “harmless” quality (Gabara 38). It functions as the emblem of a different kind of traveler and plants the very possibility of an alternative ethics of encounter that is fundamental to Mário’s ethnographic practice—in short, the walking-stick embodies the very possibility of becoming a turista and etnógrafo aprendiz. If travel and encounter present obstacles and potential perils, Mário locates a unique potential for navigating these in the

17 In O turista aprendiz, Mário portrays histories of expansion, acquisition, and exploitation as lingering in Brazil’s rubber and logging industries and in tourism itself.
bengala. He contrasts it with objects used for self-defense and domination, suggesting that the walking stick represents an alternative mode of contact—one that moves outside of models of destruction, acquisition, and control. However, if we read the walking stick exclusively as a foil to the other props, it could appear to signal the narrator’s instant shift to the opposite side of the spectrum, as if he could construct a travelling self capable of producing a satisfying corrective to the models that he obliquely references. The bengala would, in this case, represent peaceful or passive travel—travel that leaves only the faintest of tracks on the landscape in the hands of a mindful traveler, travel that moves outside of violence.

Yet over the course of Mário’s account of his travels, the walking stick acquires a multiplicity of seemingly contradictory meanings. Photographs Mário takes on his trip connect the walking stick to a set of travelling subject positions that Mário tries on and interrogates. He photographs exhaustively on his travels through the Amazon and the Northeast and, although it is unclear which images he intended to include in the final version of O turista aprendiz that never came to be, he stores the manuscript along with caches filled with self-portraits, candid shots of travel companions, landscapes, and pictures of the historical monuments and local flora and fauna he sees. In this photographic record, the walking-stick makes a variety of appearances, and Mário pictures it as part of a range of costumes. One image taken a week after his departure for the Amazons (May 15, 1927) shows Mário standing between two friends on the beach of Boa Viagem. The three men clasp arms and smile against the backdrop of a thatched-roof hut and waving palms. All three of them sport three-piece suits, hats, and shiny shoes; two wear ties, and one has a kerchief tucked into his breast pocket and carries a walking-stick off to one side. In shots like this one, the bengala appears like a gentleman’s prop, part of a costume that conveys style and class- standing (and, as Mário writes elsewhere, marks him as an urbanite on his journey up the Amazon). In others (June 18, 1927 for example), Mário pictures the walking-stick as part of an explorer’s costume—a complement to the wide-brimmed hat, knee-high boots, and rugged cotton clothes he wears to protect himself against the elements.

Taken together, these two images suggest a double meaning for the walking stick that develops in the text as well. On the one hand, a walking stick as a gentleman’s accessory suggests a kind of social power, part of costume that Mário finds familiar, if uncomfortable at times. On the other, a walking stick as a travel accessory suggests weakness and a lack of self-sufficiency; a traveler uses it to cover challenging terrain and maintain balance, relying on the object as a source of physical support. To return to the opening lines of O turista aprendiz, if the revolver, cannon, and pocket-knife reference a mode of encounter that relies on shows of force and assumes the need for self-protection, the walking-stick resets this power dynamic. In choosing it, Mário aligns the aprendiz traveler with a position of vulnerability. Even as he acknowledges his inability to completely shed his knowledge and privilege (by suggesting that he cannot simply unlearn the touristic model or forget the library of books he has read, for example), Mário constructs himself as fragile and chooses a traveling self that is admittedly—we might say deliberately—dependent.

Yet Mário crafts this inchoate, aprendiz practice not as passive, but as a practice of encounter that is actively open. In this sense, it is significant that the portrait of the aprendiz traveler Mário aspires to become and his vision of what an aprendiz practice might look like comes into relief alongside the bengala’s peculiar story in O turista aprendiz. After opting for the

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18 For the images that have made it to print, see Fotógrafo e turista aprendiz and the edition of O turista aprendiz edited by Ancona Lopez and cited in this chapter.
walking stick, the narrator downplays his decision to actually buy one, labeling it ‘foolish’ and characterizing his choice as a poetic over practical one—the work of his “alminha santa” (51). A few lines later, however, he implicitly assigns the bengala with singular value. In a sentence punctuated with repetition, he describes his frantic pre-departure sequence as hinging on the object: “[M]eio perdi a hora de partir, me esqueci da bengala, no taxi lembrei da bengala, volto buscar bengala e afinal consigo levar a bengala pra estação” (Turista 51). (“I nearly left late, forgot the walking-stick, in the taxi remembered the walking stick, went back to search for the walking stick and, in the end, managed to take the walking stick to the station.”) Relaying the whirlwind sequence of events in a sentence that manages to be both rambling and bengala-centric, grammatically speaking, Mário shows himself clinging to the walking stick as if his ability to travel depended on it; he nearly misses his train not because of oversight but because he refuses to leave without the bengala. In this sense, he ties the walking stick to commitment—to choice—rather than passivity or chance.

The decision to choose the bengala as the symbol of his journey thus complicates the image of Mário as naïve, inept traveler that he frequently revisits, while at the same time highlighting the ethical dimension of Mário’s attempt to re-imagine his subject-position as turista and etnógrafo aprendiz. If the other objects that he rejects associate the travelling, writing subject with destruction and control, the walking stick plants the initial possibility of an alternative ethics of encounter based in receptivity—what Trinh T. Minh-ha describes as a kind of “two-way movement” and “simultaneously passive-active process” (15). At first, the two representations of narrating self that Mário fluctuates between can seem conflicting: he is the erudite metropolitan intellectual and researcher on the one hand, and clumsy novice on the other. Taken together, however, these constitute the narrator as astute and vulnerable, receptive and engaged, at once critical of the histories and politics built into the practices of travel and cultural study and actively involved in exploring the possibilities to produce travel writing and ethnography otherwise. In this way, Mário’s initial portrait of the aprendiz position is one that is actively open—one that negates the notion that receptivity equals passivity.

Questioning the Ethnographic Stance: Dreams, Fictions, Informants

If Mário seizes the bengala as the emblem of an aprendiz travelling practice in the early pages of O turista aprendiz, as the text moves on, his travel journal also implicitly begins to ask what it would mean to write with a bengala in hand—to compose an ethnographic account with a walking stick. What Mário produces in O turista aprendiz in the late 1920s is not an ethnographic monograph or ethnography per se. (The text does not take up the intensive fieldwork model that was transforming the field of anthropology at the time, for example.19) But Mário’s text—half of which he subtitles Viagens etnográficas—repeatedly returns to probing the ethnographic mode at its core, problematizing in particular the ethnographer’s position as knowing subject. In this sense, Mário gets at what Sherry B. Ortner describes as ethnography in its ‘minimal’ definition: “Ethnography of course means many things. Minimally, however, it has always meant the attempt to understand another life world using the self—as much of it as possible—as the instrument of knowing” (173). What does it mean to encounter and constitute life worlds as objects of study? What are the stakes in taking on

19 On the growing role that fieldwork played in the development of anthropology, see generally One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology, as well as James Clifford’s The Predicament of Culture.
an ethnographic stance and framing oneself as an ‘instrument of knowing’ who discovers, observes, masters, and represents these worlds in writing? Mário implicitly takes up these questions alongside the research he conducts during his travels; he aims to amass folkloric material, transcribe popular ballads, and produce ethnographic descriptions of indigenous and Afro-Brazilian practices, yet all the while interrogating his own position and practice.

In the early pages of the text, Mário’s contact with “another life world” happens only in the realm of the surreal or unreal (Ortner 173). Indeed, Mário seems keen to parody the drive to know by positioning the very cultures that he aims to study and write about outside of the scope of the text’s view. As the Pedro I works its way up the Amazon River, Mário identifies “Índios” as the rumored source of the eerie whistles that emerge from the dense greenery that lines the shore. These Índios remain hidden and mysterious, however, portrayed by Mário as only echoes and distant sounds, as if he might be imagining them. He also recounts a dream about visiting a Tupi tribe that depicts him as an ethnographer doomed to failure; he works tediously to compose a proper greeting in Tupi to read upon his arrival, yet the introductions hardly go as planned. Rather than end with a warm welcome or opportunity to be inducted into the tribe, the story ends abruptly with Mário finding himself turned into a laughing stock. No sooner does he read aloud his carefully crafted ‘discurso’ than his Tupi audience starts rolling with laughter and yelling “Tá errado! tá errado!” (“You’re wrong! you’re wrong!”) The source of Mário’s error remains ambiguous—is it purely linguistic or something more? But even in this dreamworld, Mário shows himself pushed outside the realm of authority and understanding. Here he is inept at even the very initial stage of ethnographic encounter—contact (56).

When Mário moves outside the dream realm to represent a series of moments of cultural encounter and ethnographic non/production that punctuate his travels, he does so in an ironic way that destabilizes not so much his own potential for ethnographic authority as the supposedly empirical underpinnings of the genre itself. He playfully parodies ethnography when he invents an Amazonian tribe—the “tribo dos Pacaás Novos”—whom he claims to discover as he stumbles through the jungle alone, separated from his travel companions. As the lone witness to the “usos e costumes” of this “tribo curiosa” with no one else to corroborate his written testimony (he specifically uses the term testemunhar), Mário already sets up questions of truth production while toying openly with tropes of encountering the primitive or native (Turista 90). The Pacaás Novos in many ways fit the stereotypes; at moments, Mário depicts them as naked, naïve, and easily manipulated, commenting that they seem afraid of “gente branca” and do little more than ask him for presents without regard for what the objects are actually worth. “[S]empre a mesma coisa. . .” he states at one point, as if his encounter with them fit into a series of predictable patterns (90). His role in their community is similarly reminiscent of an explorer or ethnographer, but comes with an exaggerated twist. With little apparent difficulty, he finds the isolated tribe, employs an interpreter, learns the inner-workings of Pacaá culture, and produces a written account outlining everything from

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20 It is particularly interesting to think about how, in Mário’s case, the Tupi are figured not only as an unreal and intangible object of desire—he encounters them only in dreams—but also as resistant, unwilling to accept the discourse of an outsider as defining them. In this entry, Mário implies that they are more the product of creation than an authentic, primitive element of the Brazilian past or identity that can be recovered and reclaimed.

21 This entry could also be read as a subversion of the Tupi-Guarani “welcome dialogue” reiterated in texts from colonial chronicles and Jean de Léry’s 1578 Histoire (discussed later in this chapter) to José de Alencar’s novel O Guarani (1857). According to Sá, the dialogue usually starts with a Tupi interrogative: “You came?” “Yes, I came.” “Welcome” (125).
the Pacaás’ routines of quotidian life to their belief systems. Implying that his is a story that epitomizes the “ethnographer’s dream” of acquiring insider status in a target culture—the very fantasy we saw instantly thwarted in the Tupi dream—Mário designates himself a qualified expert in this previously unknown culture and a first-hand witness who is eager to talk and “con[t]ar muita coisa.” The entry—one Mário chooses to revisit nearly twenty years later and publish in two academic journals—relates an extreme ethnographic encounter too good to be true.

The highly comical, even ridiculous quality of the Pacaás entry works to draw attention to the way Mário exposes representing this ‘new’ people group as an act of sheer fabrication. In his written ‘account’ of the Pacaás Novos, the qualifier ‘novos’ becomes an ironic commentary on the discovery and description of ‘new’ peoples that he associates with the invention of America and the production of ethnographic fictions. Mário ‘discovers’ this Amazonian tribe and frames it as an anthropological curiosity yet crafts this ‘new’ people group to the point of absurdity. Most of the customs he claims to observe are inversions of Western codes of behavior; the Pacaás gather around and kick him profusely when he makes first contact, practice both polygamy and cannibalism, gesture with their feet rather than their hands, and live in almost complete silence. Members of the tribe consider sneezing a private activity, but they defecate in public. As Mário draws attention to the playful process of constructing a culture at work here, sometimes it seems as though the written account that he gives of the tribe is nothing but an exercise in taboo-testing and nonsense.

At the heart of this entry is a kind of parody of ethnography, and one that Mário positions to comment on more formal ethnographic practices when he publishes the entry in the Revista Acadêmica in 1942 and again in the Revista Academia Paulista de Letras in 1945. In this respect, the codes he attributes to the Pacaás surrounding speech and communication seem particularly subversive; the Pacaás treat unapproved acts of listening as “pecado mortal” (“mortal sin”) and consider speaking aloud a private, even sensual or sacred, act (91). Even if the narrator jokes about the extent of his insider status by describing his legs as blue from ‘speaking’ in the Pacaás language of foot gestures, kicks and pointed toes, he thus constructs one of the ethnographer’s most central activities—listening in—as threatening and transgressive. In having his interpreter-informant relate the details of “os costumes dos Pacaás” to him, Mário admits that he violates the most sacred of the Pacaás’ customs. The Pacaás Novos entry thus constructs the narrator as a delinquent and a threat to the groups he studies. The ethnographer here is both creator and criminal.

In these early examples in O turista aprendiz, Mário puts at issue the core activities of ethnographic work; empirical observation, access to cultural knowledge, writing, and listening all appear as ridiculous, thwarted, or anxiety-laden pursuits. Days after Mário passes through the Peruvian border, the Amazonian Índio ceases to be the stuff of fantasy or dreams as Mário describes taking a guided visit to a Huitôta community in which he is something of a cultural tourist. Mário describes parts of this visit in notably anthropological terms, relying on a combination of first-hand observations and information gleaned from his guide to produce a general survey of Huitôta culture. He makes note of daily cultural practices and routines,

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22 I borrow the term “ethnographer’s dream” from Mary Louise Pratt. See her “Fieldwork in Common Places.”
23 This entry appears in the Revista Acadêmica (Rio de Janeiro) in 1942 and the Revista Academia Paulista de Letras in 1945.
24 On ethnographic fictions, see James Clifford’s “Partial Truths,” in which he contemplates the etymology of the Latin fingere, “something made or fashioned,” to draw out the importance of thinking about ethnographic writings as ‘made up’—products of both labor and invention.
describing the way people dress, the language they speak (a mixture of Spanish and an indigenous tongue, he claims), the kinds of homes and shelters they build, and their typical diet and food-preparation practices. As Márió tours the community, he also extends this discussion to consider questions of Huitôta home and public life, labor, the organization of public and private space, gender relations, and folk art. In the context of a narrative that often carries a confessional tone, recounting Márió’s moments of inner-monologue and even dreams, the text noticeably shifts here into omniscient mode as the narrator relates these details in a language of fact. Earlier Márió had criticized the naturalist professor and others who travel aboard the Pedro I for cataloging the flora and fauna of the Amazons like scientists, confident in their ability to grasp empirical reality. Still, Márió uses the verb “É”—is—repeatedly in this entry, as if he were simply engaged in collecting and recording facts about the Huitôta.

Not only does the narrator describe this visit to the Huitôta community in terms of what he can observe and catalog as truth, but also what he can take away, like a tourist eager for a souvenir. While touring a home, he witnesses a group of young women preparing a meal and starts to describe them fermenting manioc, making flour, and feathering and cooking a parrot, when a painted pot suddenly catches Márió’s eye. “Pote lindíssimo,” (“The most beautiful pot”), he exclaims, then quickly tries bargaining to buy it. As with his other attempts to acquire some piece of Huitôta culture to take with him, however, Márió comes up disappointed and empty-handed. “Fiz o diabo pra comprar” —“I did everything to buy it”—he states, but his offers are refused; he leaves instead with a pot he characterizes as an inferior cultural artifact “de muito menor interesse” (115). This example is only the first in a string of moments when Márió highlights his thwarted attempts to acquire a token de interesse from the Huitôta community to make his own. He aims to photograph a particularly beautiful Huitôta girl, but she refuses to give a portrait except at a price: “Se quieren, tienes que pagar!’ she says laughing. Even his offers of money are not enough, however, when Márió aims to buy a tiny portion of the local stimulant—coca leaves. As with the pot and photograph, he portrays himself as begging, cajoling, etc, desperate to secure some coca, but to no avail. He constructs the Huitôta community as a transactional space and himself as eager to acquire, collect, and consume, yet the narrator leaves with little more than his notes and a few photographs he seems to deem inconsequential.25

If Márió avoids shying away from his desire to take, claim, or consume some piece of Huitôta culture, he increasingly exposes and problematizes this position in the curious entry that immediately follows. The next day, he describes waking at dawn and wandering outside his cabin to find the Huitôta man who led their ‘tour’ rowing a small boat alongside the Pedro I. Seizing this as an opportunity to obtain the coca he had been denied the day before, Márió motions for the man to bring the boat near and boards it. He confesses his determination to obtain coca at this point borders on obsession as he aims to “engamelar o huitôta e conseguir o excitante,” thus envisioning the unnamed guide as a nameless ‘indio’ ‘huitôta’ whom Márió can cajole (“engamelar”) and manipulate (115). The day before, Márió characterized the guide as a native informant or cultural tour guide, whose job was to relay knowledge of Huitôta life, and Márió narrates the early moments of their exchange on the boat as if the hierarchy in their relationship continued to be set along these lines. As he boards the boat, Márió orders the man around like a servant and depicts him with downcast eyes and an embarrassed smile, even as he notes an “ironia luminosa” in the man’s gaze (115). “Me

25 One shot of the roof of a Huitôta dwelling is reprinted in Turista e Fotógrafo Aprendiz.
falaram que o senhor faz cantigas, o senhor estava escrevendo num papel..." the man comments with his voice trailing off into ellipses—a graphical mark of the hierarchy of voices in the exchange. ("They told me that you write songs, mister, you were writing something on paper...") "Faço sim," Mári asserts in reply, and immediately starts pressuring the man: "Por isso pedi coca pra você," he argues, "Queria escrever uma cantiga de coca, mas sem provar como que posso fazer?" (115). ("Yes, I write them. That’s why I asked you for coca. I wanted to write a coca ballad, but without trying it, what can I do?")

As the exchange between the two men takes off, it morphs into a critique of the very hierarchy that Mári seems quick to establish. Almost like an intensification of their roles the day before, when the man was supposed to afford Mári and his companions a look into the Huitôta community, Mári initially treats his companion like a supplier—someone whose principal function is to facilitate Mári’s acquisition of knowledge and his own creative and intellectual production. In this sense, the coca represents the object of ethnographic desire on a level that moves beyond the photograph or pot examples a page prior. Whereas these suggest acquisition and the accumulation of tokens of ‘culture,’ the coca is a substance that Mári can ingest and one that is supposed to enable him to write a kind of song that he would otherwise only be able to transcribe or channel.

At first, Mári casts himself in the role of the expert intellectual who merits the kind of access and power he seeks. In the conversation he has with the guide, Mári is associated with paper, writing, and learned pursuits—he appears as the erudite and productive individual who writes, readily defines concepts like ‘laws,’ and paints himself as an expert in Inca history narrating to someone he portrays as an ignorant or simple-minded listener. Whereas Mári aligns himself with artistic and cultural creation and describes his activities in terms of active verbs like fazer and escrever (to make, to write), Mári paints the guide as mainly passive and calls him a representative of an indolent, undeveloped people. When the guide informs Mári that he does not have any coca to give, Mári launches into a tirade criticizing the present-day Huitôta for failing to live up to the promise of their Inca ancestors. He praises the Inca, painting a romantic portrait of a grand civilization complete with artists and intellectuals, riches, great palaces, and laws to protect the public good. In contrast, he calls the Huitôta “uma raça decaidá” (“a fallen race”): “não fazem nada” (“they do nothing”) he states (116). When the guide interrupts Mári’s attack and asks him to clarify terms like “decaída” and “leis”—terms Mári is using to produce a discourse about development, cultural value, and productivity—Mári not only acts annoyed but responds as if the guide’s unfamiliarity with these terms only serves to further justify his blanket critique of the Huitôta. He portrays the guide as confused and ignorant while constituting himself as an authority.

As the conversation continues, however, Mári writes it in a way that shows the power dynamic between the two men shifting, signaled by changes in the exchange of gazes and voices in the scene. Suddenly, the guide Mári had described as ‘meio envergonhado’ with “olhos baixos” meets Mári squarely with an “olhar serio,” and the pent-up “ironia luminosa” Mári had sensed living (“morava”) in his supposed ‘informant’ rises to the surface (115). The conversation that Mári had dominated begins to take a turn. Up until this point, the guide had formally addressed Mári as ‘o senhor,’ and his presence in the conversation had been minimal save the short questions (“O que é ‘decaída’?... Que que é ‘leis’?”) that Mári plays up as indications of his own authority. Yet, the guide seizes the very terms he earlier appears not to know and uses them to construct his retort to Mári’s claim that the Huitôta are decaidá, lawless, and a shadow of the Inca, “povo grande, de muito valor” (116). “Moço... Vossa fala, sei pouco,” the guide says, switching to address Mári informally (117). Even as he opens on
a humble note—“sei pouco,” “I know little”—this declaration signals the beginning of an inversion. The guide contends that he knows a Huitôta history—an alternative and, as we will see, corrective history—that Mário has ignorantly overlooked.

In the monologue that follows, the guide not only seizes control of the conversation, but also moves to turn Mário’s account of the Huitôta on its head. He launches into a story that tellingly starts to overtake the space of the page. Whereas before, Mário’s voice dominated the transcribed conversation with the guide’s voice occasionally interjecting a few words, the relationship between the two men’s voices and how they inhabit the space of the page inverts. The guide’s narration takes over, growing into a lengthy and elaborate monologue that recasts the Huitôta and challenges Mário’s portrayal in a way that not only undermines the gist of Mário’s argument but the argumentative strategies and discursive categories Mário employs. In the guide’s account, the Huitôta stopped building palaces not due to lack of skill or a loss of heritage, as Mário argues, but because they over-excel at the task. He narrates a history in which Inca rulers built palaces so grand and beautiful that the rulers turned competitive and tyrannical, fomenting a civil war. Deemed a threat to society, palaces were outlawed in favor of more humble, practical structures, and the Huitôta eventually became such a peaceful and content people that they no longer needed artificial rules (laws) imposed by a government or authority. Instead of deficient and lawless, the ‘fallen’ descendents of the Inca, the Huitôta are gifted, resourceful, and committed to the public good, according to the guide’s history. Even the Huitôta’s position as wards of the Peruvian state—they live on a kind of reservation in return for 20 days of agricultural labor per year—is the result of their admirable commitment to non-violence rather than testament to their vulnerability or conquest in the guide’s account. “[A]gora ele já passou pra diante do tempo do palácio e da lei,” the guide tells Mário, portraying the Huitôta’s story as one more characterized by progress than decline, “Huitôta é feliz, moço, não é gente decaída não” (118). (“The Huitôta have surpassed the time of the palace and the law. . . The Huitôta people are happy, boy, not a fallen people at all.”)

The guide advances this counter-history before returning to the subject Mário most cares about: coca. He admits that he has been carrying some in his pocket all along yet asserts that he has made the conscious decision to withhold it. In doing so, he closes off a scene in which we see Mário stage a quandary of his aprendiz practice: how to avoid an essentially consumerist model in which informants function like servants or conduits. In the early moments of the exchange, Mário casts the guide in a subservient role yet readily acknowledges the irony that the man holds the key to his ability to write a cantiga de coca. That is, as Mário tells it, the guide’s initial function is to provide Mário with what he wants, and Mário’s goal is to extract it from him so that he can get to the work of writing cantigas de coca. Mário portrays his dependency on the guide—unlike the dependency he seems to claim and celebrate when he chooses the walking-stick—as severely frustrating, and Mário stages himself like a demanding turiôta, eager to buy what he wants and eliminate the guide from the equation as quickly as possible. The guide, however, refuses his prescribed role. He deliberately keeps the coca tucked away and gives Mário a counter-history of the Huitôta instead. He is willing to play intermediary, but not in the way Mário wants.

It remains unclear whether the exchange Mário writes like a transcribed conversation between himself and the guide was real, imagined, or something in between. Many of the entries in Mario’s travel journal experiment with extreme representations of travelers, tourists, and ethnographers—the wealthy coffee heiress and naturalist professor who travel with Mário through the Amazons aboard the Pedro I, the researchers rumored to ‘kill’ a man
with their invasive camera while studying the rubber trade, the ridiculous explorer-ethnographer of the Pacáas Novos. The entry with the Huitôta guide might very well represent a moment when Mário turns this critical gaze upon himself. He suggests that the encounter with the guide brings out a kind of harsh corrective, and Mário emphasizes how the guide emerges through their conversation not only a resistant subject, but also a kind of teacher. He foregrounds how the man whom Mário initially cast as subservient and backwards, unfamiliar with terms like “decaída” and “leis,” seizes and deploys these very concepts in the course of crafting his own alternate history. As Mário writes it, the guide delivers the final blow—his explicit refusal to give Mário the coca that he owns up to carrying just out of Mário’s grasp, “no bolso, aqui” — “in my pocket, right here”— with a particular twist. Although the Huitôta are allowed to chew coca, the guide reminds Mário that the stimulant is outlawed in Mário’s society. He therefore reasons that giving Mário coca would equate encouraging him to break the law and become a delinquent—to turn him into the lawless individual without regard for the common good that Mário had attacked just moments before. In essence, Mário shows the guide turning the turista into the target of his own critique and seizing not only a kind of narrative authority, but a moral one as well. As Mário tells it, the guide makes himself the voice of reason.

Even as Mário stages it as a corrective moment—a lesson in becoming aprendiz—this can make for a disquieting scene. After all, it can be difficult to see Mário as little more than arrogant and imposing, blinded by the desire to acquire and consume, and quick to exploit—characteristics he earlier cast as part of the travel identity that he set out to reject. And yet Mário writes his one-on-one exchange with the Huitôta guide in a way that highlights the scene’s disquieting quality, experimenting with strategies to account for the way that the encounter unsettles him and exploring possible (self) correctives. He refrains from defending himself or framing the guide’s monologue in any way. Instead, the narrator’s voice pulls back, and the transcribed voice of the guide overtakes his own, filling the page. Moreover, whereas Mário initially constructs himself as the locus of knowledge—he is the man of letters who has a firm grasp on writing (papel), abstract categories (leis, decaída), and history—the standing of who has and produces knowledge flips to the guide in the course of their exchange. In Mário’s account, the guide refuses to serve as his supplier, constructs an alternative history of the Huitôta, and produces a highly creative and rhetorical retort to Mário’s attacks, all the while taking on an increasingly instructive voice.

The writing formally reflects and manifests this shift. Rather than interject or interpret, Mário writes the conversation in a way that emphasizes—even embraces—an inversion of the two men’s roles. He refuses to penetrate the guide’s monologue and transcribes it as a series of extensive paragraphs, uninterrupted. As the usually vociferous narrator falls quiet, it is as if Mário has become the in-between, the facilitator, as he allows the guide’s voice and history to dominate the discursive space of the exchange and the physical space of the page. For all his protesting, by the end of the entry, Mário’s presence can best be described as unobtrusive. He focuses on relaying the guide’s narrative—one that functions like a history lesson—without inserting any commentary. He portrays a glaring asymmetry that grows between the two men’s voices, letting it suggest a narrative self in crisis. He then leaves the crisis unresolved. At the scene comes to a close, Mário avoids offering any explanation or interpretation, coming to his own defense, or giving a final summation.

On this as a violent photographic practice, see the entry “Caso Pançudo”—The Pançudo Case—in Turista page 75.
Instead, he gives the Huitôta guide the final word and closes the June 23rd entry with the man’s instructions: “Falei mas foi pro senhor escrever uma cantiga mais bonita” (“I’ve been talking but it’s so mister can write a prettier ballad”) (118). What Mário stages as a scene of intended extraction—one in which Mário configures the ‘índio’ Huitôta as a conduit or intermediary—ends by suggesting the possibility of corrective receptivity. As he pulls back and falls quiet, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what Mário is doing, but he seems to be listening.

Aprendiz Listening: Encountering what is ‘outside-of-key’ in the Brazilian Nordeste

Learning how to listen—particularly learning how to listen to instructive voices in unexpected places—lingers as a central motif and critical task for Mário’s etnógrafo aprendiz as his research and travels continue outside of the Amazons. In 1929, while Mário travels through the Brazilian Northeast and composes the notes and journals that make up the second half of the Turista aprendiz manuscript, the ethnographic undertones of the first section come to the forefront. As implied by the subtitle Mário gives this section—viagens etnográficas—the last half of the text specifically deliberates the possibility of reconciling an aprendiz position with the practice of encountering and writing about cultures—the practice of ethno-graphy in its etymological sense.27 That is, if the first half of O turista aprendiz includes moments when Mário shows his aprendiz position tested, even failing miserably, the second half proposes to make these very moments of lack and thwarted expertise the starting-point for an alternative ethics of cultural encounter and ethnographic practice. In the process of documenting and studying nordestino culture, especially regional music, Mário contemplates a model of interacting with his supposed ‘informants’ that demands that he learn to hear different forms of knowing and articulating knowledge, while also staying especially attuned to voices and encounters that mark him as a novice.

An avid musicologist (Mário chaired the History of Music and Aesthetics department at the São Paulo Conservatory and published prolifically on the topic), Mário spends much of his time in the nordeste doing what he calls “harvesting”—collecting and documenting the regional customs that he portrays as thriving Brazilian traditions.28 He puts special focus on investigating the region’s largely unrecognized musical traditions that he argues challenge the narrative of “erudita” Western musicology (239).29 Relying on pen and paper along with the occasional piano that he happens to find (he travels without a gramophone), Mário transcribes lyrics and musical notation for over one thousand songs, mostly regional ballads called cocos, which he implies come from a song-tradition that may be traced back to slaves.

27 Some scholars have argued that Mário’s ethnographic intentions were thwarted during his time in the Amazons due to his responsibilities as escort (“cavalheiro escoltando”) to the Brazilian coffee heiress Dona Olivia Guedes Penteado (Vida 22). See the introduction to Vida do Cantador. Dona Olivia travels aboard the Pedro I and, a patron of the modernista arts, funds Mário’s travels in the Amazons. It appears that Mário paid for his trip to the Nordeste with his earnings from a series of academic lectures.

28 It is worth noting that Mário’s 1928 trip to the northeast coincides with the emerging regionalista literary movement. See Neusa Quirina’s unpublished dissertation Estudando a marginalia for an analysis of the extensive notes Mário pens in the margins of his personal copies of regionalista texts including O Quinze (1930) and A bagaceira (1928). The former portrays the nordeste as devastated by drought, the latter as a graveyard or trash heap.

29 Documenting northeastern music was one of Mário’s initial goals for the trip. See his letter to poet and friend Manuel Bandeira dated May 19, 1926 in which Mário describes his intent to “recolher documentos musicais” (in Branco 22).
brought from Africa. In the coastal city of Natal, Mário finds the coqueiro—a singer who specializes in performing the traditional, regional songs that Mário admits captured his interest immediately when he first heard them performed by nordestino friends in São Paulo. Indeed, Mário seems almost entranced when he describes meeting the singer José—“um coqueiro de verdade” and “homen do povo” (“a true coqueiro” and “man of the people”)—who agrees to perform a variety of cocos for Mário to hear and transcribe (239). As Mário sets up a scene in which a kind of transfer of musical knowledge is supposed to take place, he in many ways constructs José as the epitome of nordestino authenticity that Mário has been seeking and an expert singer, capable of rendering an artform and an entire cultural landscape accessible and knowable to Mário. Mário describes José’s physical being as if it were an echo of the northeastern landscape and the soundscape of the songs he sings. He observes between them a mimetic relationship—a “fenômeno de mimetismo” (239). José is, as Mário introduces him, a “nordestino puro,” intimately connected to the land and to tradition, untainted, and, as such, we might assume the seemingly ideal informant or source (239).

More than an encounter between the paulista scholar and a sought-after representative of Northeastern cultural difference and authenticity, Mário’s time with José quickly turns to unsettling Mário’s sense of both what he knows (his sense of expertise) and what he can know (his sense of the knowledge he can attain). Mário introduces himself as an expert musicologist qualified to preserve a northeastern musical tradition and publicize the work of this “coqueiro de verdade” (“true coqueiro”). However, the man who is supposed to bring the authentic coco within his grasp—to render the genre accessible and knowable to him—forces him not only to listen, but to listen differently. As soon as it seems like José and his songs represent a curiosity or object of study to Mário, they begin confusing his attempts at understanding them. “Que voz!” he exclaims when José starts singing and brands the man’s voice “curiosíssima,” but he also marks the difficulty of identifying and describing what he hears: “Que voz! [...] Não é boa não, é ruim [...] Em que tonalidade estão cantando? Às vezes é absolutamente impossível a gente saber” (239). (“What a voice! [...] It’s not a good one, no, it’s awful [...] In what key are they singing? At times it’s absolutely impossible for us to know.”) What should be immediately obvious to a trained musicologist like Mário—the key in which José and his companion coqueiro sing—is subject to a question mark. Furthermore, Mário includes his readers in the confusion. “[A] gente”—we—are the subjects of limited knowledge, unable to place precisely what we hear.

According to Mário, the reason why the key is difficult to place and, by extension, what makes José’s voice ‘ruim’—literally, bad or awful—is that both exist outside the norm of “a música erudita,” especially the ‘erudite’ European tradition (239). What sets the northeastern coqueiros apart, he posits, is their distinctive ability to move outside of the confines of the almost universal twelve-note scale. He highlights their capacity to vocalize (“entoar”)—to give voice to—the spaces between notes, and thus make meaningful the spaces that he claims European music neglects (239). In doing so, Mário constructs the space in-between notes as a privileged space within the soundscape of José’s song—and one that the trained musicologist cannot enter. As Mário alternates between explaining bits of musicology

30 See Oneyda Alvarenga’s introductory comments to the posthumously published collection Os cocos.
31 This recalls an environmental determinist perspective, most famously articulated in the Brazilian milieu by Euclides da Cunha’s monumental Os Sertões, whose three sections “A terra,” “O homem,” and “A luta”—the land, the man, the war—detail the people of the northeastern desert known as the sertão as a product of their harsh environment. Mário pens a brief but rather scathing critique of Euclides’ work in TA (294).
32 This entry appeared in the Diário Nacional, Jan 15, 1929.
and trying to better pinpoint what makes José’s voice so unique, he likewise alternates between sharing his knowledge of the field with readers and showing how listening to José undermines his sense of expertise. In his estimation, hundreds of possible notes (vibrações) could exist between the dó and the dó, yet cultures from the Greeks to the Chinese have divided the scale into the same number of steps. Mário credits coqueiros nordestinos like José with breaking from this, observing that they hit variants of notes previously unexplored and give voice to a new spectrum of sounds that the dominant, supposedly ‘erudite’ music traditions underestimate or neglect. “O quarto-de-tom de que a música erudita não se utilizou na civilização européia, esse estou mesmo convencido que os nordestinos dão” (“That one-quarter-key unused in the erudite music of European civilization, that’s precisely the one I’m convinced the nordestinos hit”) (239). In Mário’s portrayal, the regional coqueiros literally strike a tone that Europe has—maybe can—not.

Moreover, Mário privileges what ‘European’ or ‘erudite’ musical traditions are unable to register, even as he recognizes that this means his own language and categories are admittedly insufficient to record what he hears. As he describes it, the key in which José sings, in fact, does not fit. It is not tuneless (“desafinado”) as in without or devoid of tune; it is “positivamente ‘fora de tom,’” he says (259)—positively outside of tune. He goes on to suggest that this ‘outside’ is not random or meaningless, but “sistematizado neles” (“systematized inside [José and his singer partner]”)—specifically part of an interior structure that he cannot access. Not only does Mário admit that he is incapable of identifying the exact key he hears, but he cannot make sense of the larger structure in which it fits. Instead, it is “neles”—inside them—hidden within the coqueiros and a structure that he associates with an inaccessible cultural interiority. Mário thus positions the key outside of identifiable, familiar scales and the realm of what he can know, name, and apprehend.

In fact, while he describes listening to José, Mário unapologetically accentuates his position of lack. As we saw in the opening pages of the text when Mário constructed himself as a nervous, novice traveler, yet claimed this as part of a self-reflexive and alternative practice, here Mário elaborates lack as a critical component of an aprendiz listening practice. He lacks the ability and language to ascertain and identify for readers José’s tone (“Em que tonalidade estão cantando?”), lacks the musical equipment to register or measure it (“carecia de aparelhos especiais que não tenho aqui”), and cannot even imitate or hit the “quarto-de-tom” with José and the other coqueiro’s help when they model it for him (239). When he sits at the piano to ‘fix’ the key (“fixar”), it proves elusive once more. He tries to sing along and asks the coqueiros to guide him through the rest, but they change keys to ‘accommodate’ him, he says. The closest Mário can get is a nearby note: “Se fixo uma tonalidade aproximada no piano e incito os meus dois coqueiros, cantando como eles, se... amansam, caem no ré bemol maior, por exemplo” (“If I fix a nearby tone on the piano and get my two coqueiros started by singing like them... they accommodate me, they fall back into D flat major, for example”) (239-40). If, however, Mário stops playing and commits himself to listening, the singers return to the melodic space Mário is unable to enter. “Se paro de cantar, voltam gradativamente pro ‘fora de tom’ [...] e é um encanto” (“If I stop singing, they gradually return to the ‘outside of tune’ [...] and it’s enchanting”) (240). Only when Mário suspends his efforts at apprehension or imitation do the singers venture back into the ‘fora de tom’. And rather than express frustration with his inability to enter this soundscape, Mário celebrates it as “um encanto” and describes himself as “pasmo”—bewildered or stupefied. The ‘expert’ musicologist no more, he positions this ‘fora de tom’ outside—but comfortably outside—the scope of his ethnographic abilities.
Listening Lessons, Language Lessons: Chico Antônio’s ‘De-forming’ Melodies

Audible but not identifiable or attainable—this is the kind of voice Mário increasingly trains his ear to listen for in the nordeste. As Mário looks to adjust his ear, he also looks to adjust his positionality as researcher and etnógrafo, a move that resonates in his interactions with the singer he credits with teaching him the most about the coqueiro tradition—a singer named Chico Antônio, whom Mário meets in Natal in early 1929. When Chico Antônio first sings for him, Mário describes it as a humbling scene. He depicts the singer crafting a custom, spontaneous coco for the inquisitive “dotô” (“doc”) from São Paulo—an introductory coco that predicts that Mário the “doctor” will soon become the student and the coqueiro the memorable teacher. Chico Antônio kneels before Mário and begins the song by declaring his skill at what he calls “making tangles”—a phrase that doubles as both a colloquial expression for “weaving a coco” and a statement that following or unraveling the ‘strands’ of the coqueiro’s intricate creations will prove a difficult, potentially confounding task. Addressing Mário as “dotô,” Chico Antônio moves on to acknowledge Mário’s role as researcher and intent to circulate Chico’s cocos outside of the northeast. What Chico promises, however, is that he will give Mário much to talk about “quando chegá em sua terra”—when he arrives in his own land (273). Structured around the theme that the “doctor” should prepare himself to listen to a voice so powerful that it makes the land tremble, the rest of Chico Antônio’s introductory coco essentially works like a call to Mário to listen up and listen good.

As Chico Antônio dips into his repertoire of traditional cocos and starts teaching them to Mário, he performs with a blend of such command and creativity that Mário depicts him as an unrivaled master of the coco genre. Chico approaches the act of performing with a flair that transforms and reinvents each song he sings, making it no surprise to Mário that even the most common, classic cocos are known in the locale as “coco[s] de Chico Antônho,” as if Chico had composed them himself (277). As he writes about listening to the coqueiro sing, Mário wanders between piecing together a story of Chico Antônio the singer (and idol coqueiro for the young singers in the area) and piecing together his observations about what is like to witness the man perform in person. Embedded in Mário’s meandering narration is the notion that his experience as writer, musicologist, and researcher are all rendered small in the face of Chico Antônio’s voice. The more he listens, the more Mário elevates Chico Antônio to the level of author, composer, and “poeta,” and he goes about enumerating the skills of the man whose voice, phrasing, breath, and rhythm are so extraordinary that, when he sings, “não se sabe se é música, se é esporte, se é heroísmo” (“It’s impossible to know if it’s music, if it’s sport, if it’s heroism.”) (277).

According to Mário’s journals, the two men spend around three days together, yet Chico Antônio’s inspiration for Mário is long lived. Chico Antônio becomes the inspiration for a number of the entries Mário reproduces in his O turista aprendiz column in the Diário Nacional in 1929, the uncompleted novel Café, and a number of book projects (some only posthumously published) including Os Cocos, As Melodias do Boi, Na Pancada do Ganzá, and “O Cantador”—a short fiction series that Mário publishes in the São Paulo Folha da Manhã from August-September 1945.

One of the nicknames Mário says he acquires on his trip through the nordeste is “O dotô que veio studá Boi” (267). “The ‘doc’ from São Paulo who came to study ‘Boi’”, in reference to the regional Boi dances and songs. This suggests an intriguing contrast with the ‘anthropologist as hero’ model, in which the anthropologist gets credited for heroically studying cultures before they disappear. See, for example, Susan Sontag’s writings on
Similar to José’s ‘fora de tom,’ Chico Antônio’s voice puts Mário in contact with a new musical register—one that productively dislocates Mário’s sense of musical expertise and forces him to seek an alternative vocabulary and approach to producing what Michel de Certeau describes as a “language of the new” (215). In the series of entries Mário writes in his journal and subsequently publishes in the Diário Nacional about his days with Chico Antônio, he problematizes some of the discursive processes that Certeau traces in a sixteenth-century text similarly situated at an intersection of ethnographic writing and travelogue, as well as one that Mário acknowledges as lingering in the background of O turista aprendiz: Jean de Léry’s 1578 Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil (History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil). 56 A text generally noted for its role in the Brazilian modernist imaginary—it likely inspired Oswald de Andrade’s pau-brasil (brazilwood) metaphor—the Histoire gives a first-person account of Léry’s travels in Brazil as a French exile on an expedition to the Bay of Rio (now Rio de Janeiro) in order to help found a Calvinist colony. It also, in Certeau’s reading, invites examination as an ethnographic text, constituting one of the earliest European accounts of the coastal Tupinambou (Tupi) people, with whom Léry shared a lengthy, if unexpected stay.38

In Léry’s Histoire—the same text that Claude Lévi-Strauss called “the anthropologist’s breviary” and carried in his pocket during his first visit to Brazil—Certeau gives particular attention to examining the co-production of written language and ethnographic knowledge (Tristes 81). 39 He argues that Léry goes about writing (graph-ing) difference in his description of the Tupi, attempting to bring the “new world” (Léry’s emphasis) that he encounters in Brazil into what Certeau constructs as ‘old’ world systems of understanding (219). In the process, Certeau thus brings attention to ethno-graphic production as discursive production, connecting the Histoire’s struggle “to be grounded as a discourse of knowledge” with its attempt to constitute a semantic field capable of mapping out what Léry calls this “new world”

Lévi-Strauss, including “A hero of our times” (1963), later published (with some additions) as the title essay in Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Anthropologist as Hero (1970).

56 See Mary Louise Pratt “Fieldwork in Common Places” on the boundaries—often heavily policed by anthropologists, in particular—between these two genres. Léry’s text recounts his 1556-58 travels, and Mário makes a handful of direct references to the Histoire (See, for example, Turista 336.)

38 Poet Oswald de Andrade (no relation) was a central Brazilian modernist figure and author of multiple manifestos outlining the goals and commitments of the modernist movement. (This includes the 1928 Manifesto antropófago.) One of these, Manifesto da poesia Pau-Brasil, proposes to use Brazil’s first export product—brazilwood—as the raw material for a new poetics and politics. This re-fashioning of a ‘native,’ ‘natural’ material important for colonial relations (Brazilwood was a key export to sixteenth-century Europe, where it was used principally for making dyes) then produces what scholars like Madureira see as a central metaphor of Brazilian modernism (See Cannibal Modernities 28). Although Oswald and Mário were friends—Oswald took part in the ‘discovery’ trip to Minas Gerais and was initially scheduled to travel together with Mário and other modernistas to the Amazonas—the two broke ties in 1929.

39 Taking up chapters 7-19, Léry’s description of the Tupi occupies a significant portion of his text. Other early accounts include Pedro Vaz da Caminha’s “Carta a el Rey Dom Manuel” (Caminha was a member of Pedro Álvares Cabral’s fleet), writings by the Franciscan André Thevet, and the captivity narrative of German soldier Hans Staden, True History and Description of a Land belonging to the wild, naked, savage, Man-munching People, situated in the New World, America, which was published in 1557 (Sá 96, 93).

Lévi-Strauss also calls the Histoire “that masterpiece of anthropological literature” in Tristes tropique (83). As a budding anthropologist just-arrived in Brazil, Lévi-Strauss carries the book in his pocket while he walks around the Avenida Rio-Branco in Rio de Janeiro, fully aware that where he stands was “once a site occupied by Tupinamba villages” (81). “[B]ut in my pocket I carried Jean de Léry, the anthropologist’s breviary” he contends, as if the book could function like a stand-in for the decimated Tupi. Mário’s relationship to both Léry’s text and the Tupi suggests quite a contrast.
That is, in the process of trying to depict the Tupi in writing, Léry invents them as a ‘primitive other’ that European understanding can purportedly dominate, according to Certeau. In this sense, Léry looks to apprehend and organize what Certeau calls “the space of the other” along a series of axes — ‘civilized’ (Europe) and ‘primitive’ (America), “over here (the same) and over there (the other),” “‘them’ and ‘us’” (219, 215). And although Certeau sees Léry as grappling with these categories in the process of trying to render this ‘new’ cultural world in writing, he argues that the text extends an essentially colonialist paradigm, working via an economy of extraction, appropriation, and consumption.

Interestingly, Certeau closes his reading of the Histoire with a comment on voice — the emerging focus of Mário’s coqueiro studies. Where Certeau sees the potential for the voice of the Tupi ‘other’ to break open the Histoire’s restrictive discursive schema, writing that “voice can create an aparté, opening a breach in the text,” what we see in Oturista aprendiz is an experiment with ethno-graphic language that looks to maximize the potential for ‘new’ voices to create ruptures in fields of language and knowledge. In the entries with Chico Antônio in particular, Mário suggests that listening to and recording Chico’s voice in writing necessitates alternative writing and listening practices. When at their first meeting he takes note of Chico’s tendency to alter melodies ever-so-slightly, creating a series of subtle yet imaginative melodic variations, Mário begins experimenting with vocabulary that puts pressure on Certeau’s construct of the “language of the new”: “Com uma habilidade maravilhosa vai deformando a melodia em que está. . .” Mário writes (“With marvelous ability, he goes about deforming the melody he’s in. . .”) (273). Like José’s ‘fora de tom,’ Chico Antônio’s particular vocal technique — in this case, his tendency to ‘de-form’ melodies, as Mário calls it — forces Mário to struggle to find (or create) the language to describe sounds he has never encountered before. Whereas Mário positioned José’s ‘fora de tom’ outside his grasp as writer and researcher, not so much in order to relegate it the margins as to mark its resistant intangibility — here he uses language that portrays the newness he encounters in Chico’s ‘de-formations’ as actively undermining and collapsing the very possibility of a restrictive writing-knowledge system like the one that Certeau describes.

Embedded in the initial designation Mário gives Chico’s technique — ‘deformative’ — is already the sense that, for the aprendiz practitioner, contact with Chico’s voice prods the listener and tests the limits of what can and cannot be written. Even as he describes studying Chico Antônio’s songs for hours on end, Mário treats the coqueiro’s tendency to ‘de-form’ melody as a newness that is incongruent with “erudite” (by now an adjective meaning both European and scholarly) musical idioms and structures of understanding. Rather than give up entirely or try to force this voice into familiar models, reducing the difference in order to force it to fit, Mário chooses to emphasize the destabilizing power of Chico Antônio’s voice. He spends days as the picture of the feverish researcher, “grafando... melodias que ele canta” (“recording... the melodies [Chico Antônio] sings”), but readily acknowledges that he finds it impossible to write down and explicate Chico’s melodic ‘de-formations’ (277). What Chico Antônio does with his voice Mário states cannot be said (“não se diz!”), let alone put into traditional musical notation. Instead, “a notação erudita nem pense em grafar, se estrepa,” he writes. Chico Antônio’s voice not only eludes what “erudite” notation can grasp, but, as two possible meanings for the verb estrear-se suggest, makes this system of representation both “come out all wrong” and “come unstuck” (277).40

40 Two possible translations would be “erudite notation can’t even think of recording [this], it comes unstuck,” and “erudite notation can’t even think of recording [this], it comes out all wrong” (277).
Describing “learned notation” as tested or forced to “come unstuck” infers a peculiar, yet positive connotation for Chico Antônio’s ‘de-formative’ technique. Like when Mário labels José’s voice ‘bad,’ his choice to term Chico’s technique ‘de-formative’ can seem to imply distortion and a level of aural chaos—certainly not the kinds of sounds usually considered pleasing to the ear. But as Mário constructs it, Chico’s ability to ‘de-form’ melodies represents a transgressive musical innovation. He characterizes Chico Antônio as pushing the very limits of what can be articulated in sound and—equally important for the narrator of the viagens etnográficas—what can be written, described, and studied. For Mário, in the act of ‘de-forming’ melodies, Chico Antônio does not engage in making the melodies misshapen or ruined, but in freeing them from form, in simultaneously collapsing and loosening meaning, if we take the double meaning for the verb estrepar-se into account. The coqueiro’s voice produces sounds that dominant forms of notation should not even think about recording, Mário says, but sounds that also push these systems to estrepar-se—to face their limits and become “unstuck.” In response, Mário attempts to avoid reducing Chico’s voice into some version of what he already knows, evoking instead a language of marvel (”Não era desse mundo mais,” “Estou divinizado por uma das comações mais formidáveis da minha vida”) and a language of celebratory confusion and suspended articulation (“O que faz com o ritmo não se diz!” “What he does with rhythm can’t be said!”) As Chico Antônio goes about “deforming” melodies, Mário suggests that he also goes about collapsing—‘de-forming’—Mário’s categories of musical notation, language, and, ultimately, understanding.

Consequently, Mário’s interactions with Chico Antônio increasingly take on the contours of an instructor-student dynamic in which Mário positions himself as the novice listener and (albeit inadequate) scribe. He explicitly dedicates his January 11th entry—one also published as part of his series of crônicas in the Diário Nacional—to Chico, implying that the coqueiro is as much the author here as Mário himself. Mário then parallels the two men’s activities and goes about constructing the process of transcribing Chico’s cocos as a necessarily co-operative one; he writes and wrestles with musical notation, Chico Antônio ‘weaves’ or ‘tangles’ cocos, he says; “Nossos trabalhos”—our work-product, our labor—Mário calls their combined efforts (279).

At the same time, Mário complicates an interlocutory model, suggesting that more than assume an equality between him and the coqueiro, he must actively work to fashion himself as Chico’s inferior. If Mário portrays singer and scribe engaging in a kind of collaborative

41 Although I lack the space to develop this here, it is worth considering the contrast between the language of marvel Mário employs and that employed by Léry. Certeau identifies “marvels” in the Histoire with “the visible marks of alterity” (Writing of History 227). For the narrator of Turista aprendiz, marvels seem to mark moments of encounter that scramble, even invert hierarchies of power, particularly in the way they silence the subject who is supposed to be ‘speaking’ and ‘knowing.’ See also Stephen Greenblatt’s Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World for a theory of the marvel and a reading of Léry.

42 Chico Antônio serves as the focus of Mário’s 15, 16, and 17 February 1929 crônicas.

43 The critique of the interlocutory model is perhaps most famously associated with Edward Said’s critique of revisionist anthropology in “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors.” Said writes that a “thunderous” silence exists where the voices of anthropological interlocutors are supposed to be. Look at even ‘revisionist’ anthropological texts, he argues, and "you will begin perhaps suddenly to note how someone, an authoritative, explorative, elegant, learned voice, speaks and analyzes, amasses evidence, theorizes, speculates about everything—except itself. Who speaks? For what and to whom? The questions are not pronounced, or if they are, they become, in the words of James Clifford writing on ethnographic authority, matters largely of ‘strategic choice.’ The histories, traditions, societies, texts of ‘others’ are seen either as responses to Western

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musical enterprise, he also paints this as an enterprise in which Chico Antônio takes the lead and overshadows the scribbling “dotô” (‘doc’): “Passei hoje o dia com Chico Antônio, conversando, grafando. . .” Mário writes, then tracks how the scenes of intended transcription that follow only further highlight the contrasts between the power of Chico Antônio’s voice and Mário’s inadequacies as researcher (277). Whereas his attempts at representation and imitation consistently fall flat, he describes how their ‘recording’ session turns into a communal event with the “incomparable” coqueiro at the center (278). The pull of Chico Antônio’s voice carries in the wind, drawing people, one by one, to join a growing circle of listeners that Mário characterizes (along with himself) as enraptured: “[A]té onde o vento leva a toada, os homens do povo vem chegando, mulheres. . . sentam no chão, se encostam nas colunas do alpendre e escutam sem cansar” (277).

Including himself in this circle and extending it to his readers, Mário reflects on the privilege he has to try his hand at recording Chico Antônio’s songs while also representing himself as testing his ability to listen like an apprentice. Whereas in earlier scenes he failed at lecturing a Tupi tribe or bargaining with the Huitôta guide for coca, subsequently portraying himself as silenced—forced to listen—in the series of entries that concentrate on Chico Antônio, Mário works at enacting listening and receptivity within the scope of his research and writing practice. He punctuates the scenes with Chico Antônio with instances of fine-tuning, questioning, and correction, in integrating moments of instruction into his account and thus laying bare a sense of ongoing, self-reflexive process and subject-tuning. Mário admits that Chico undoes much of the previous research Mário has collected about the coqueiro tradition because he teaches him to listen for more than generalities or false totalities: “É prodigioso” (“He’s prodigious”), he writes of Chico. When he tries to interject some observations about the ‘typical’ coqueiro nordestino’s art in the middle of one of the crônicas, he gets in a few words before the particularity of Chico Antônio’s voice cuts through: “Mas Chico Antônio ultrapassa de muito os que tenho escutado. . .” (“But Chico Antônio greatly surpasses those I’ve heard. . .”) (278). Chico Antônio’s voice functions like a corrective to his potentially overarching analysis, and Mário lets it interrupt, alter, and intervene in his research and writing process. In doing so, he brings to his account the sense of receptivity and investment in apprenticeship that he claimed as part of an alternative, critical travel practice in the early pages of the text. In descriptions like this where questions of travel and encounter conjoin with questions of ethnographic stance, representation, and writing, Mário’s pen acquires strikingly similar attributes to the walking-stick that he chose when he set out from São Paulo. Active openness, wandering, and vulnerability become incorporated into what an aprendiz practice might look like on the page.

When, in the final entry in his series about Chico Antônio, Mário contemplates the farewell coco Chico Antônio composes on their final afternoon together, he suggests that the etnógrafo aprendiz confronts similar challenges as the aprendiz traveler, inhabiting a double-position of authority and dependence, privilege and lack—a position at once acutely self-aware and openly naïve. Partially reproduced at the heart of the entry, Chico’s song sounds a counterpoint to the list of travel props Mário evoked in the opening lines of O turista aprendiz. His lyrics read like an inventory of the research instruments that Mário has continually grappled with and portray as inadequate, from the piano that fails to help him locate José’s initiatives—and therefore passive, dependent. . .” (Said 212). I take up these issues of voice and the dynamics between ethnographer and source in chapter four.
‘fora-de-tom,’ to the tools linked to the writing and transcription process that Mário problematizes when describing Chico’s deformações: “Adeus piano de tocar!/ Adeus tinta de iscrever! / Adeus papel de assentar!” (“Farewell piano for playin’!/Farewell ink for writin’!/Farewell paper for recordin’!”), Chico sings. By enumerating these instruments (piano, ink, paper) with an activity that corresponds to Mário (playing, writing, recording), Chico’s song functions—mainly by way of synecdoche—as a micro-study of the musicologist and his pursuits.

Already the tools and activities Chico lists conjure a kind of double reading and “two-way movement” that we saw embodied in the walking stick (Trinh 15). On the one hand, they each speak to kinds of power that Mário problematizes as he writes about his research and travels: the opportunity to write and document practices, to study, and to “dar a conhecer”—to make known. As Chico himself recognized at their first meeting, the ‘dotô’ from afar is the one who will put the coqueiro’s songs on paper and circulate them outside of the northeast. But by this point in the text, the problems and positionalities associated with these tools and activities have multiplied; Mário keeps writing, keeps transcribing, keeps collecting coconos and describing the rituals that surround their production and performance, but he also shows how all the instruments that Chico lists have failed him or how using them brings to the surface his inadequacies and uncertainties about using the self as an instrument of knowledge. To add to this, Mário regularly debunked his privileged standing as a metropolitan intellectual in the text by reiterating that his subjects see him as a curiosity and a joke—a perspective he usually avoids contesting. “[T]he doc from São Paulo studyin’ Boi” (“o dotô que veio de S. Paulo studá Boi,” “o dotô de São Paulo que veio estudá Boi”) people nickname him in the streets of Natal, and Mário confesses that local talk of his research usually earns him finger-pointing and ridicule (259, 267). Associated with compulsive note-taking wherever he goes, Mário represents not so much a man of letters as a man of paper, and he is made fun of for writing on everything—even an empty cigar-box at one point when he misplaces his notebook.

Chico’s farewell coco serves as another one of these moments when Mário is the subject of his informants’ gaze. At the same time that Chico’s song can seem to call attention to Mário the writer, in the larger context, it calls attention away from him, asking us to think about the other perspectives, voices, and individuals behind the piano, ink, and paper, many of which Mário himself has aimed to highlight. That is, while Chico’s lyrics focus on the research instruments and activities we might immediately associate with Mário, his performance also calls this exclusive focus into question; the song makes Mário the implicit agent of the verbs (he is the one playing the piano, transcribing the melodies, etc), but Chico is the agent of enunciation in the scene, shown to be inventing another acutely perceptive coco on-the-spot. Through his performance and the lyrics he invents reflecting on the instruments and processes involved in the ethnographic exchange, Chico designates himself as observing, composing, and creating alongside Mário, suggesting that all the tools he inventories are tools that the researcher and coqueiro have, in fact, shared.

This is one of the few cocos that Mário takes the time to partially transcribe in the pages of his travel journal and turista aprendiz newspaper column (he keeps most of them separate and saves them for musicological publications), and it is one that he apparently needs to mull over. He writes the lyrics and scene at least twice, once in his main travel journal and a second time in the small notebook he uses for comments and shorthand accounts of his daily

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44 Boi refers to a type of song and dance performance common to the Northeast that particularly interests Mário.
activities. In both versions, he spends an unusual amount of time recalling the details of Chico Antônio’s final, improvisatory performance with a tone of melancholy. The time of day, Chico Antônio’s expression, the image of the coqueiro’s hand raised in an “adeus de árvore”—a tree-like wave—all earn mention in Mário’s narration, and he surrounds the quoted lines from Chico’s song with fragmented images that speak to his sense of loss. He replays the scene of Chico’s departure over and over, interspersing images of falling dusk, a nighttime characterized by a sadness (“tristura”) so acute that it bruises and burns, a tiny bedroom light, and the thundering drums of a zambê—a dancing coco—barely audible in the distance. The sense that Chico’s departure dislocates the narrator is also reflected in the discontinuity of the narration. Mário abruptly moves back and forth in time in the entry, jumping between scenes of Chico singing, then leaving, then preparing to leave and singing his goodbyes again. This temporal dislocation only seems to grow; Mário concludes the entry describing “uma sensação estranha de século XIX”—“a strange, 19th-century sensation”—as if the zambê that he hears transports him back to a time when slaves, hopeful for liberation, danced to the rhythms of the contemporary coco’s musical ancestors.

When Mário prepares to quote directly from Chico Antônio’s farewell coco, he sets the song up as an overt reminder of the coqueiro’s centrality and Mário’s own dependence on the singer: “[D]isse que. . . havia de ter saudades dele; mas que se voltasse por estas bandas que o mandasse chamar e ele viria. Então principiou se despedindo dos nossos trabalhos, do papel em que eu assentara as melodias dele, da tinta, do piano, tudo” (“He said that. . . I would miss him; but that if I were to return to these parts I should call and he would come. Then he started taking his leave of our work, to the paper on which I had registered his melodies, to the ink, to the piano, everything”) (279). The commentary—albeit fragmentary—that Mário provides before and after the song likewise turns it into an invitation to recognize the interlocking forms of expertise at work in the transcription and research process while also underscoring his underlying dependence on the coqueiro. On the one hand, Mário asserts his role as writer and scribe (“eu assentara. . .”), but on the other, he approaches Chico’s song as a reminder that he cannot make claims of mastery—not over the tools or the transcribed songs, written in his own hand, that come out of his coqueiro studies. Emphasizing Chico Antônio’s gestures of generosity (he even volunteers to sing for Mário should he return to continue his research), Mário interprets the song as a parting gift—something granted or presented to him—and as a personalized farewell to the doctor and “nossos trabalhos”—to the co-created work that Mário and Chico have produced. In turn, the language Mário chooses underscores that he cannot lay claim to the melodies Chico has shared with him; they remain invariably “dele”—his (356). Put in writing by his hand yet not his own, Chico’s farewell coco generates an opening for Mário to test being both etnógrafo and aprendiz.

“Não fui feito para. . .”: Founding a praxis on what you were not ‘made’ to do

At various points in O turista aprendiz, Mário conveys that the success of his viagens etnográficas depends on the participation of individuals like Chico Antônio—street performers, shamans, washing-women, cooks, and coqueiros—people willing to sing and perform for him, tell their stories, and share what they know. At times, Mário even complains that he is powerless to pursue his research without “informants”—informants. After hours spent waiting in vain for someone to come sing for him in the city of Paraíba, for instance, he seems

to confront the flip-side of the dependency that he at other times celebrates: “Manhã inutilizada”—a morning wasted—he calls it, frustrated, in the pocket-sized notebook he kept with the Turista aprendiz manuscript that Mário edited repeatedly but never finished or published in its entirety.⁴⁶

In the account Mário gives of the time he spends in the Nordeste studying the coco tradition, he experiments with taking this sense of dependency—granted a sometimes uncomfortable and frustrating one—a step further, however. He suggests that an alternative ethics of encounter and ethnographic practice can flow from seeking out an aprendiz positionality—a positionality rooted in inexperience and lack, one that cultivates an investment in openness, learning, and listening. More than rely on coqueiros like José and Chico Antônio to furnish him with stores of knowledge or enable Mário’s coming-of-age as ethnographer, facilitating a transformation from fumbling researcher to coco expert, Mário suggests that he depends on them for lessons in how to listen, how to encounter and respond to newness and otherness, and how to negotiate a relationship to ethnographic study and writing that gets outside of epistemological models based in acquisition or assumptions of mastery. In the case of Chico Antônio, Mário’s investment in recasting his informants as teachers would echo through his writings beyond O turista aprendiz as well. In 1943 he publishes “Vida do Cantador,” a series of short fiction pieces in the São Paulo newspaper Folha da Manhã that feature Chico Antônio as the protagonist coqueiro who defeats the devil with song. “Seis lições”—six lessons—Mário entitles the six stories. Almost twenty years after the ‘dotô’ and coqueiro meet, Mário implies that Chico Antônio still has something to teach and Mário still has reason to listen.

“Não fui feito pra viajar,” “Ainda não sei viajar”—“I wasn’t made to travel,” “I still don’t know how to travel.” Mário affirms and reaffirms this view in the pages of O turista aprendiz, portraying himself as a nauseated, disoriented, and sometimes comically clumsy traveler. As a travelogue writer, he faces another set of quandaries with candor, emphasizing what he cannot say or describe, and stringing together moments when he finds himself speechless or unable to write. “Deveria ter feito esta viagem com menos idade e muito menos experiência . . .” (“I should have undertaken this trip when I was younger and much less experienced”), he states early on, as if the supposed wisdom brought by age or experience would only cloud the process he is struggling to work out (62). As Mário constructs it through his account of his viagens etnográficas, he ‘wasn’t made’ for ethnographic practice either. That is, as it turns out, where he looks to start and to stay.

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⁴⁶ Labeled “Notas de Viagem ao Nordeste,” the booklet contains a number of similar statements. See, for example, “Pensava trabalhar muito hoje porém não apareceu ninguém” (563).
Chapter Three

Gathering Together:
Re-collecting and Archive in Darcy Ribeiro’s Maíra

“Sem eles quem me-há-de-lembrar?”
“Without them, who would remember me?”
—Mairun god in Maíra

“The archontic principle of the archive
is also a principle of consignation, that is,
of gathering together”
—Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever

By the time Darcy Ribeiro published his first piece of fiction—the novel Maíra—in 1976, Ribeiro had written and re-written the novel at least three times, “desde o ponto zero” (“from ground zero”) and, in the case of the second and third versions, completely from memory (Introdução 20). He drafted the first version of the novel while living in exile in Uruguay and struggling to complete the manuscript for O Processo Civilizatório (1968), the first in his ambitious, five-volume series Estudos de Antropologia da Civilização.1 From its inception, Processo was poised to be a controversial text. Its central thesis—that the stages of socio-cultural evolution taken as universals demanded to be rethought from a Marxist perspective—set Darcy on a head-on course with heated debates about why some cultures are said to ‘dar certo’—to come out right—while others do not. The intensity of the Processo project took its toll, concerns about the authoritarian military regime that had forced Darcy into exile continued to weigh on him, and he found himself overwhelmed with the task of writing while plagued by insomnia and failing health. Accepting his doctor’s orders to rest and provisionally abandon the theoretical text, Darcy took a sojourn in a small pension run by an Italian matriarch (she prescribed her own cure of pasta and jugs of homemade wine), and he wrote a novel instead.

Later, Darcy would reflect on the process of composing Maíra as a process of recollection, both recollection as remembrance and as a formal practice of gathering together again, of re-collecting. Completing the novel would entail a series of recurring attempts at recollection in a most basic sense: Darcy lost the Uruguay manuscript, so when he found himself in solitary confinement, imprisoned after returning to Brazil, and looking to take up writing Maíra for a second time, he did so with no notes or record of the initial draft that he had penned in Uruguay. Instead, he started Maíra from the beginning, (re)writing the novel by hand on the limited number of sheets of paper afforded him by the prison guards and

1 The five books that make up this series are O Processo Civilizatório, As Américas e a Civilização, O Dilema da América Latina, Os Brasileiros: Teoria do Brasil, and Os Índios e a Civilização. Following the lead of Brazilian scholarship, I refer to Darcy Ribeiro by his first name throughout this chapter. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Portuguese are my own.
working from memory. Although he made some effort at smuggling this manuscript out of
prison so that it could be typed by a friend, Darcy would end up having to piece together the
novel for a third time—again working with nothing save what he could recollect from
previous drafts and living in a second period of exile, this time in Lima. A kind of therapeutic
exercise and purging of the self, penning the novel doubled as a memory practice according to
Darcy; the novel offered him a way of recuperating ties to the country that had exiled him,
remembering what he called the best years of his life—those he spent conducting
ethnographic fieldwork in Central Brazil and the Amazons—and even re-connecting with the
writing process itself. (The sojourn worked. He would finish Processo and publish it in 1968.)
“[N]ão estava no exílio enquanto escrevia; mas na Amazônia, com meus índios... recordando
episódios, conversas, observações, milhares delas que eu não podia supor jamais que
estivessem depositadas em minha memória,” (“I wasn’t in exile while I was writing; but in
Amazônia, with my indians, remembering episodes, conversations, observations, millions of
them that I could never have imagined might be deposited in my memory,”) he would later
write, reflecting on the process of composing Maíra (22). This vision of the novel as a
repository for recovered ‘deposits’ of memory would come through in the story of the text’s
reception as well. Once published, Maíra was eagerly adopted in many anthropology
departments in Brazil, making its way onto course syllabi as a kind of experimental
ethnography and literary archive of ethnological research about Brazil’s indigenous
populations.2

A fragmentary text told in a rotation of alternating voices and disjointed chapters,
Maíra itself would take the form of a collection. Eschewing a single storyline, the plot
assembles an unlikely cluster of narratives including a murder investigation, a homecoming
narrative, and an in-depth study of an Amazonian indigenous tribe. The text’s form similarly
contributes a kind of found quality to the novel. As they flip the title page, readers encounter
a small map, sketched by hand, then an annotated kinship diagram of circles, triangles, and
connecting lines that resembles the kind found in an ethnographer’s journal or monograph,
including Darcy’s own Diários Índios (1996) and “Religião e mitologia Kadiwéu” (1950). In
the narrative chapters that follow, the novel demands that readers continue to sift through a
myriad of documents and textual materials, juxtaposing bits of omniscient narration with
inner-monologues and religious confessions, diary entries, letters, police dispatches and
governmental documents, excerpts from a Catholic mass, indigenous creation narratives, legal
declarations, and ethnographic descriptions. Smatterings of Latin and an unnamed
indigenous language appear in the predominantly Portuguese text, as well as song lyrics,
overheard phone conversations, and oral histories. And while the novel is structured into four
main sections—Antifona, Homilia, Canon, and Corpus, each taking its name from an element in
the Catholic liturgy—it creates a chaotic assortment of sixty-six chapters, exhibiting an
interplay of texts and genres that forces readers to labor through a text that works much like a
collection or archive of textual fragments. The novel’s composition, then, necessarily draws
attention to its visible seams and ruptures, gaps and inconsistencies.

The thematic pull that connects these disparate pieces is the Mairum people—a
fictional Amazonian indigenous group that Darcy fashioned as a conglomerate of various

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2 See Claudio Bertolli Filho’s “Literatura e Antropologia em Couto de Magalhães e Darcy Ribeiro,” included in
Civilização e exclusão. On the novel’s initial lack of reception in literary circles, perhaps due to the fact that it was
read more as piecemeal ethnography than novel—a text “elaborado com sucata de material antropológico”—see
Moacir Werneck de Castro “Um Livro-Testemunho” (391).
groups he studied as an ethnologist with the Brazilian Serviço de Proteção ao Índio (SPI) beginning in the late 1940s.³ Creation narratives, kinship structures, ritual performances and intricate descriptions of rites-of-passage—many seemingly lifted from Darcy’s monograph and his numerous ethnographic publications—reappear in Mairá. Interspersing these ethnographic bits throughout, the text stages a kind of found ethnography, pulling readers back repeatedly—if sometimes jarringly—into the story of the Mairum. Many of the central conflicts in the novel stem from a crisis signaled in the annotated genealogical chart, which shows the Mairum line of succession in jeopardy due to the impending death of its chieftain. The novel’s disparate storylines also converge upon the happenings of the Mairum aldeia—the town depicted in the hand-sketched map that opens the novel. The aldeia is at the center of the murder investigation involving the dead body of a white, pregnant woman, Alma, who had moved to the Mairum town and ‘gone native.’ (Government documents and correspondence included in the novel show that police suspect that the tribe has played some role in her death.) The aldeia is also the site of the novel’s homecoming narrative, which belongs to Isaías/Avá, the presumed future chieftain whose double-name reflects his doubled trajectory as a Mairum man taken from the tribe as a young boy to be educated for the priesthood in Rome. Broken up and told non-chronologically, these storylines are interspersed with chapters dedicated exclusively to offering a close look at a particular aspect of Mairum culture, such as a funeral ritual or a piece of Mairum cosmology and look much as if readers had been allowed access to a fieldwork description or an oral history transcript. At the same time that the Mairum people—their setting, their cultural life, their future or fate—might unite the novel in some way, the Mairum constitute a center that is made up of—and told through—multiple fragments and voices.

This fragmentary, polyphonic quality positions Mairá in tension with the ethnographic monograph, refusing to replicate the “documentary realism” and “authoritative appropriation of cultures as holistic, internally consistent, and transparently interpretable,” that Amy Fass Emery associates with the genre (94).⁴ Formally, Mairá rejects the holistic gesture, working instead through what scholars including Lúcia Sá have likened to Lévi-Strauss’ bricolage; the novel is made through fragmenting and reconstructing other sources and texts—an exercise in building out of “restos e cacos,” “remains and shards,” that results in a striking formal heterogeneity (in Vasconcelos 205). Moreover, with its rejection of the unified, or univocal, Mairá pushes up against the meaning of the prefix mono by working to diffuse narrative authority and produce a novel that is highly, perhaps excessively, multiple. If we tend (too easily) to read the monograph as monologue, then in Mairá, the novelist/anthropologist invites a multitude of voices into the novel, which as Sandra Vasconcelos suggests, “reparte a tarefa de relatar o encontro da cultura mairun com o mundo ditto civilizado entre diferentes narradores, oferecendo ao leitor uma multiplicidade de pontos de vista e ângulos...” (‘shares the task of relating the encounter of the Mairum culture with the so-called civilized world between different narrators, offering the reader a multiplicity of points of view and angles.’

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³ Darcy is the first ethnologist hired by the SPI and counts its founder, Marechal Rondon, among his most important mentors. The SPI is founded in 1910 and becomes the Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) in 1967.

⁴ See Chapter five of Emery’s Anthropological Imagination in Latin America, “The ‘I’ of the Anthropologist: Allegories of Fieldwork in Darcy Ribeiro’s Mairá” and Sá’s Rainforest Literatures. Sandra Guardini T. Vasconcelos extends Sá’s reading of the novel as bricolage in her article “Cacos de Espelho.”
In the process, the novel gathers together voices and fragments we might expect to find in the kind of focused, ethnographic study Darcy was trained to produce in a British-functionalist tradition; a kinship diagram, indigenous cosmology narratives, and ethnographic descriptions find a new home here. In this sense, *Maira* stages a delve into the ethnographic archive and presents like an alternative one itself. It enters and explodes the ethnographic archive, only to gather and extract, inscribe and arrange the materials it finds, enacting a process of consignation—a term that Derrida develops in *Archive Fever* to suggest not only the act of entrusting, depositing, or putting into storage, but also “gathering together signs” (3, his emphasis). Through this attention to consignation and the way in which it “governs” the archive, Derrida suggests that because archives function as gatherings of signs, they cannot help but resist uniformity and house a multiplicity of meanings. As much as he connects archives to law, violence, and the centralization of authority—he traces the etymology for archive to “the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates... those who commanded,” thus connecting archives to the exercise of political and interpretive power—the archives’ standing as consigned demands that they be read not as unified or coherent wholes, but instead as collections that function as both houses or dwellings and archeological sites laden with traces, inscriptions, and impressions. Consignation, he writes, “aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration,” but it produces archives that cannot help but house what Derrida evokes as a strata of ‘impressions’ (3). This, in turn, complicates archives’ association with singularity, systematization, and ‘ideal’ unity. Instead, “the logic and semantics of the archive, of memory and the memorial, of conservation and of inscription... put into reserve (“store”), accumulate, capitalize, stock a quasi-infinity of layers, of archival strata that are at once superimposed, overprinted, and enveloped in each other” (22). Reading the archive thus involves a practice that Derrida describes in terms of excavation—of digging into a site packed with layer upon layer of surfaces and signs. It also, as *Maira*’s own performance of ethnographic re-collection and archive suggests, opens the archive for re-readings and reconfigurations.

**Borrowing from the Archive: Sketches, Maps, Kinship Charts**

*Maira* starts out looking more like a found text than a novel. The first few pages are scattered with rough, hand-drawn, black-and-white sketches that seem right out of a fieldworker’s journal or ethnographic study. One sketch appears on the title-page and depicts a bending, head-dressed figure grasping a bow. In early editions of the novel, the sketch is huge, and not only spills over the book binding to cover two facing pages, but collides and overlaps with the novel’s title, which is rendered in thick typeface and all-caps. This overlap makes it appear like the title of the book has been superimposed on a found or borrowed page from another text. Similarly, facing the page that lists the novel’s chapters much like a table of contents, we find a pair of drawings that work together like a visual study of a detail that seems to have caught the fieldworker’s eye: we are offered two views of a rectangular tattoo or decoration that spreads from the hip down the outer thigh of a presumably indigenous.

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5 The “multiplying of narrators” is also key to Walnice Nogueira Galvão’s reading of *Maira* as a departure from *Indianismo*: “Here, the solution is found in the fragmenting of the narrative focus and the multiplying of narrators, each with his own diction” (in Sá 154). See “Indianismo Revisitado.”
woman. The larger of the two sketches offers a complete, frontal view of the woman, showing her from head to toe and standing as if she were facing viewers directly, (her sex characteristics are roughly drawn in, but her facial features are left out), while the smaller sketch zooms in to allow us to examine the decoration itself, highlighting the intricacy of the woman’s patterned adornment in a close-up, side shot. By pairing these two sketches and positioning them to face the novel’s list of chapters on the opposing page, the text seems to juxtapose two modes of indexing—one common to the novel and another better acquainted with ethnographic record-keeping.6

Flipping through the rest of the text, we can find dozens of these sketches interspersed throughout. Some depict what appear to be ceremonial events. Others isolate objects of interest like the kind we might expect to look back at us from the display cases of some ethnographic museums—weavings, spears, sculptures, and art objects. In all of these, like the sketches that feature prominently in the first few pages of the novel, the lines are jagged and imprecise, sometimes drawn over in repeated sweeps so that the outlines of the figures appear undefined or in movement. Often the shading behind and around bodies and objects is extreme and uneven, seemingly made with a leaky pen or blunt pencil turned on its side. Made (and sometimes signed) by the artist Poty, these raw pen-and-ink sketches sporadically appear throughout the novel alongside corresponding narrative descriptions, providing visual glimpses into life in the Mairum aldeia.7 But through their jagged lines and rough style that suggest quick execution with little more than a pen or pencil and paper, they also give the impression of being lifted from an ethnographer’s notebook, as if the novel were reproducing a fieldworker’s hasty, on-the-spot renderings of notable objects or scenes observed.

Deferring further the narrative sections of the text, Maíra continues gathering what appear to be fragments of an ethnographic study focused on the Mairum by inserting two documents before chapter one begins: the first is a map of the “Aldeia Mairum” shown from a birds-eye perspective, and the second a kinship diagram, labeled the “Genealogia Mairum.” Together these two pages identify the Mairum community as a focal point for the novel, providing an introductory frame for the text but also laying out the aldeia much like an ethnographic site. The rudimentary, hand-drawn map offers readers a view of the Mairum town from above, depicting it like a series of concentric circles. We see the circular arrangement of houses, each one labeled with a family name and linked with the central Baíto and ceremonial patio by way of a straight line that indicates a caminho or path, giving the overall layout of the town a wheel-like appearance.8 Crisscrossing the wheel are curved lines

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6 This pair of images appears opposite the list of chapters in the first Portuguese edition of Maíra (1976), but interestingly it is omitted from the opening pages of the novel’s 20th anniversary edition, which includes an introduction by the author and an appendix of critical essays. Instead, the two sketches are moved and appear as the closing illustration for the chapter “As Minhas Águas.” There they are shrunk to be a few inches tall, and the proportions between them change drastically. In general, in the anniversary edition, the sketches appear to be more neatly placed throughout the text. They are smaller and frequently centered on the page, making them feel more tailored to fit within the limits of the book; they no longer spill over the book’s binding or consume entire pages. Their reduced size also slightly reduces the lines’ rough appearance, so that the sketches can look a bit more like polished illustrations.

7 As the novel moves on, the sketches also include glyph-like symbols and miniature figures—a small house, a long-legged bird holding a fish in its beak, etc. The Brazilian artist Poty (short for Napoleon Lazzarotto) illustrated a number of Brazilian literary texts, including works by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Rachel de Queiroz, and Guimarães Rosa.

8 Lúcia Sá traces the wheel layout back to Darcy’s description of a Canela (Gê) village included in Os Índios e a Civilização (1970). See Rainforest Literatures.
designating different regions or sections within the community; on the horizontal plane, “os de baixo” (“those below”) is sketched in tandem with the above “os de cima” (“those above”), and likewise the map divides vertically into two “metades”—one half labeled “amarela-solar” (“solar yellow”) and the second “azul-lunar” (“lunar blue”). Like the sketches interspersed throughout the novel, the map is hand-drawn, but it has been rendered with more precision—the circles appear near perfect, the lines defined, and the handwriting is consistent in style and size, making the map appear to be the product of multiple drafts and a careful synthesis of collected information.

The map functions like the cartographic equivalent of an establishing shot for Maira. It provides readers with a visual layout of the aldeia, orienting readers within a physical space that the novel will frequent. And yet, the schematic that the map provides appears to be motivated less by geography than by Mairum concepts or structures of space. That is, the map seems aimed at documenting the physical layout of the aldeia—plotting paths, patios, and houses—but it plots these according to the unseen structures that organize and underlie it. The map shows the community organized according to familial casas and divided into invisible metades that separate ‘old clans’ from ‘new’ ones. It even suggests the values attached to concepts of color and duality (above and below, solar and lunar), showing how these concepts influence the aldeia’s design. Although the map bears one mark that orients readers within a Western cartographic system—the “N4” at the very top positions the aldeia four degrees north of the equatorial line—it mostly works outside the cartographic code that most readers will find familiar (27). Instead, the map references Mairum social relations and belief systems, but leaves them unexplained, lacking a key or legend that might offer guidance to the reader. In this way, the map invites—even demands—that readers reference other documents in order to attempt to decode it. It also opens the novel—and its portrayal of the Mairum—as a process of collecting bits and traces. Furthermore, the map bears the mark of someone’s hand—the peculiarities of penmanship and hand-drawn imperfections remind us that someone made it—but who? For what purpose and what audience? If maps are made to orient in space, this one—extracted from context, unaccompanied by a key, and positioned at the very beginning of the novel—also introduces the aldeia on a somewhat disorienting note.

With the aldeia map and the kinship diagram that appears on the following page, Maira starts the text off in an archival mode, accumulating materials about the Mairum that evoke the ethnographic archive in particular, but also positioning readers as engaging a collection of ethnographic fragments. Immediately following the map, we turn the page to find a two-part “Genealogia Mairum,” the upper half of which diagrams Mairum kinship through the geometric figures and branching lines customary in anthropology kinship charts. Triangles stand in for male subjects, circles for females, and the chart employs a network of connecting lines and equal signs to designate the familial bonds and unions within and between two Mairum families or houses—the “casa do carcará” and the “casa do jaguar”—each of which is presented as a vertical column (29). If the aldeia map offers an overview of the spatial-cultural arrangements that structure the Mairum aldeia, then the “Genealogia Mairum” accompanies this with a map of the Mairum kinship system—a systematizing diagram of the Mairum kin that Maira notably presents in the abstracted idiom of cultural anthropology, as if the novel were re-collecting a section extracted from a monograph or formal anthropological study.

9 Although I reference various drafts and editions of the novel in this chapter, all quotes are taken from the twentieth anniversary edition of Maira, published in 1996 by Record.
Unlike the map of the aldeia, however, the genealogia diagram comes accompanied by a large block of text that occupies the bottom half of the page—a narrative rendering of the same kinship system depicted above. The first sentence reads like a matrilineal report of ‘who begat whom’: “A onça Putir da casa do jaguar pariu a onça Moitá que pariu a onça Pinu, que pariu a onça Mbiá. . .” and so on, the text recounts a bare-bones list of mothers and daughters in descending order to draw the lines of Mairum lineage (29). After tracing this succession of births in the casa do jaguar, the narrative flips to string together a parallel account of the casa do carcará, much as if the genealogia narrative were tracing Mairum lineage as two parallel lines, in a similar mode of its visual counterpart above. However, the tone of this narrative often distinguishes itself from the more reductionist version of relationships given in the kinship chart. Whereas the chart abstracts each individual to a name and gender symbol (as with the aldeia map, we are given no key), the narrative adds more information about many of the figures named in the diagram and fits their stories within a larger social fabric. We learn, for example, that Uruantã and Anacã fulfill a leadership position that carries the title tuxauda, and that Isaías/Avá’s “disappearance” from the aldeia produced an important break in “a tradição” because it caused his intended bride to marry someone else. The kinship chart that hovers above the narrative alludes to this through a solitary triangle that it positions on the margins of the carcará lineage, indicating a male outsider who joined with the carcará house, but only through the narration are we made aware that this change has set in motion an impending crisis of succession: “Há quem duvide de que Náru possa um dia ser aroe e gerar um tuxaua. Mais duvidoso ainda é que sua irmã haja de parir o futuro aroe” (“There are those who doubt that Náru might one day be the aroe and produce a tuxaua. More doubtful still is that his sister might produce the future aroe”) (29). Although the novel has yet to develop it, Maíra thus uses the genealogia page to signal its central conflict, but it does so by putting two versions of the Mairum kinship system right up against one another—one that resonates with formal anthropological practice and another narrated from a collective, presumably Mairum perspective.

The relationship between the visual and narrative components of the genealogia is not so much corrective or dissonant as it is dialogical. In Maíra they inhabit a single page and appear one right above the other; there is no line or border to separate the two. They almost physically touch, squeezed onto a page with reduced margins, small font, and little white space. The diagram and narrative often overlap in their content as well; readers can glance up at the diagram while reading the narrative, locating the Mairum names that earn mention in order to have a better sense of where each descendant fits in the overall lineage. Likewise, readers who examine the diagram—especially those unfamiliar with how to decipher the kinship graphics it contains—can look to the narrative for clarification. This combination of proximity and overlap makes the two parts of the genealogia not only appear interconnected, but also encourages readers to create interplay between the diagram and the narrative block of text—to make the two ‘talk’ to one another. Readers can continue this conversation outside of the genealogia page by flipping back to the aldeia map and locating the jaguar and carcará residences. They can also use the genealogia as a reference when reading the novel and trying to place its many Mairum characters in relationship to one another.

The genealogia recalls the abundant kinship charts that branch out over the oversized pages of Darcy’s Diários Índios (1996), the published volume of his early field journals, as well as the topic of his first publication, the article “Sistema Familiar Kadiuéu” (1948), a kinship study based on fieldwork with the Kadiwéu in Mato Grosso do Sul. Darcy would later consider kinship studies an old-school practice in anthropology, writing about it as a throw-
back to the days when anthropologists went in search of universals and many seemed to believe that collecting and de-coding kinship systems could help them trace human origins.\(^\text{10}\) Still, the kinship diagram remains a constant in the surviving manuscripts and drafts of \textit{Máira}, functioning as a framing device for the novel that puts anthropological modes of collecting and ordering a cultural world at the forefront of the text.\(^\text{11}\) With the kinship diagram, \textit{Máira} makes use of a record-keeping system and genealogical mapping practice particular to anthropology and at a critical moment in the text; the network of circles and squares translates the Mairum kinship network into a kind of visualized, disciplinary jargon, compiling Mairum social relations and displaying them in the worked-out schematic of an anthropologist.

At the same time that \textit{Máira} designates or makes use of this mode, it also refuses to leave it standing alone. The diagram comes coupled with the narrative, so that the \textit{genealogia} page essentially repeats the same genealogy twice—a kind of redundancy or doubling that draws attention to the way Mairum kinship is (and can be) told. The narrative section suggests a tradition that parallels the anthropologist’s, while also hinting at the kinds of voices that might have enabled an anthropologist to produce the kinship diagram displayed above. Visually, the \textit{genealogia} presents like a layered construction—the kinship diagram inhabits the upper half of the page and the narrative is presented like a block of text that sits below—and while the compressed look of the page serves to highlight the juxtaposition between the two, it also invites readers to create interplay between them. In this sense, \textit{Máira} doubles up on genealogies, squeezing two different modes of collecting and relating Mairum kinship onto a single page, and enlisting two registers from the ethnographic archive simultaneously. This doubling effect renders the novel’s consignation practice readily visible—the text is picking up and reconfiguring various pieces, constructing the novel out of fragments—but it also primes readers to think about the various modes and registers that make it into the archive. With the map and the kinship diagram, \textit{Máira} begins the process of gathering documents, collecting traces, and grouping together different codes. From the start, \textit{Máira} thus suggests that it compiles and constructs the Mairum out of fragments culled from the ethnographic archive, but even the initial collection that it puts on display marks the text’s consignation practice as one that resists unity, evoking the multiple layers present in the archive.

\textbf{Held up?: Arrested in the Archive}

As it goes about extracting pieces from what looks like an anthropological archive, \textit{Máira} also positions itself to contemplate the politics of archive, particularly how ‘official’ archives get mobilized as stores of information, suggesting that many of the fragments it re-collects come enmeshed in archives produced to create stores of knowledge about the Mairum. The novel fosters an indeterminacy about most of the documents and fragments that it collects, refusing to absorb them into the novel’s various storylines or neatly incorporate them within the text as a whole. Nevertheless, these materials often gesture to ‘official’ archival projects mentioned in the text, particularly those employed by two institutions that figure prominently in the novel—the Brazilian State and the Catholic Church. The \textit{aldeia} map

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\(^{10}\) See Darcy’s introduction to \textit{Diários Índios} (1996).

\(^{11}\) All of the manuscripts I have consulted at the Fundação Darcy Ribeiro include the chart and feature it in this prominent position between the title page and the start of chapter one. My thanks to the librarians at the Fundação for their assistance with the manuscripts.
never gets attributed in *Maira*, for example, but it could be part of a mapping project that the novel situates within a history of the Brazilian state using archival ‘evidence’ to legitimate the seizure of indigenous lands. About halfway through *Maira*, we learn that a senator intent on laying claim to Mairum lands has recovered a number of maps from the state archive—maps that the novel connects to a long-standing practice of dispossessing and displacing Mairum and other indigenous groups in the Amazon region. In the novel’s most explicit mention of archive, the *senador* is said to cull “mapas antigos da concessão de terras á Missão de Nossa Senhora do Ó, no arquivo do Estado” (“ancient maps held in the State archive from the concession of lands to Our Lady of Ó Mission”) (282).

The reference to the ‘ancient maps’ comes in the middle of a chapter narrated mainly by Juca, an excommunicated Mairum man and travelling merchant who divulges his intention to profit off the corrupt senator, who has enlisted Juca as an informant. As Juca tells it, the *senador* requires a guide to supplement and finish where the *mapas antigos* left off. The *senador* purports to then use the ‘completed’ maps as the official documentation that he requires to declare the land corporate property and legitimate its seizure. In one passage, Juca lets his assistants in on the *senador*’s plan and his role in it, unapologetically tying the collection of information about the local lands to a corrupt, expansionist project: “Só precisam, agora, do nome dos rios, igarapés e lagoas e de algumas informações mais sobre os terrenos para dividir e registrar tudo. . . em nome da Companhia Colonizadora do Iparanã, dirigida pelo genro do senador” (“All they need now are names of the rivers, waterways, and lagoons, plus some information about the terrain so that they can divide and register everything. . . in the name of the *Companhia Colonizadora* of Iparanã, run by the senator’s son-in-law”) (282). Juca describes this process as a certainty—his job is only to fill in a few blanks so that “tudo”—everything—can be mapped out and claimed by the shamelessly named *Companhia Colonizadora*—the Colonizing Company. (Juca may have the name wrong, but he accurately represents the project and demonstrates no qualms with intending to profit from it by sharing his knowledge of the land.) In the process of dictating to his assistants the route that he has charted in order to collect the necessary “informações” and complete the job, Juca sketches his own map in the sand with his finger to illustrate. The text describes him as exposing the land, opening a wound in the earth through the act of mapping: his map—“aberto ali na areia,” “open there in the sand”—is figured by the text as an opening for the *senador*’s colonizing project that is gaining speed and poised to penetrate and consume Brazil to its very depths, according to Juca: “No futuro, depois de demarcadas e registradas as glebas da faixa do Iparanã. . . o senador requererá outra faixa no interior e continuará assim, mata adentro, colonizando a mataria, até o fundo do Brasil” (283). (“In the future, after the zones along the Iparanã that are suitable for growing crops have been demarcated and registered. . . the senator will request another zone in the interior and keep going, going from the jungle inwards, colonizing. . . up to the innermost parts of Brazil.”)

Although *Maira* does not trace these developments in detail—we are given only bits and pieces of this story, too—it portrays the *senador*’s project as more than a megalomaniac’s dream. In the final chapter of the novel—one in which readers overhear and move through broken conversations involving nearly every character in the novel within the space of a few pages—the text alludes to how the *senador*’s expansionist plan is already leaving its mark on the local landscape. We overhear an unidentified speaker reporting that the *senador* has used federal troops to push the Epaxã tribe off their lands and charged the tribe “como invasores da fazenda do senador” (“as trespassers on the senator’s ranch”) (576). Readers learn that the only trace of the Epaxã that will remain comes in the form of the perverse place-name the
senador has chosen for the fazenda that he is building on the seized lands: “Você verá... dos epaxãs só vai guardar o nome: Fazenda Epaxã. É o nome que o senador botou” (“You’ll see... the only Epaxã thing that he’s going to keep is the name: Fazenda Epaxã. It’s the name the senator gave it.”) (576). As this speaker emphasizes, the Epaxãs have been doubly dispossessed; their place on the map and role within the economic and cultural landscape of the senador’s design has been effectively erased, reduced to a name that the senador also appropriates when he passes off the tribe’s name as his property and testament to his spoils. From the way the senador deploys the mapas antigos that he retrieves from the State archive to the way he goes about collecting informações and producing new maps to legitimate his takeover, the novel uses this example to portray how archives can be used and produced as holds of knowledge to be exploited by those in power.

One of the many, discontinuous narratives readers are given in Maíra, the cluster of events surrounding the senador’s enterprise (an enterprise which hinges on culling from ‘ancient’ archives and producing new ones to fabricate property claims) illustrate the abuses of archive as “sources of information” and sites of “capture” that preoccupy Diana Taylor in Archive and Repertoire (21, 20). Taylor theorizes archives as bound up in an epistemic system that both privileges evidence and permanence (especially written records) and relies on collecting as a mode of control. Pulling examples from a series of conquest and colonial encounters in the Americas, she argues that the colonial archive assembled collections of “supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)” that came to be figured as storehouses of information about indigenous cultures, as well as sites where these cultures could be presumably ‘captured’ and controlled (19). In the process, this legitimated certain ways to “generate, record, and transmit knowledge” while threatening to displace other “vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” (2, 21). For this reason, Taylor looks to designate an alternative to the archival collection, a space exterior to it where other traditions can endure. In place of archive, she proposes to recuperate what she refers to as embodied memory or repertoire, drawing attention to the “so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual” in order to consider not only what the archive might exclude, but also what “exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it” (19, 20). By positioning the repertoire outside the archive’s grasp, Taylor’s theory thus designates an alternative space for the transmission and survival of resistant cultural memory. On the other hand, it raises questions of whether the archive can hold resistant traces of its own.

If Taylor looks outside the archive to locate possible traces of survival and resistance, Maíra looks into it. That is, the novel performs a kind of archival practice, collecting and gathering together the very kinds of materials that Taylor identifies with archival ‘capture’ and presenting them to readers for re-examination. The text produces its fragmented account of the Mairum community in particular through engaging the very kinds of materials Taylor aligns with archive, accumulating and filing textual fragments, rifling through documents, and, as we will see, handling the bones of a fallen, Mairum chieftain. All the while, Maíra probes the novel’s possibilities to (re)collect these materials differently and contemplate what deposits might make their way into the archive. Although in the process, the text turns a critical eye to examples like the senador’s, showing how he uses the archive to legitimate brazen land theft and criminalize the Epaxã people, the novel simultaneously works to read the archive as laden with traces and impressions—many of which rattle against the institutions and structures of authority that build and employ them.

The principal structure employed by the novel—one introduced in the list of chapters
and reiterated by the title pages inserted at the start of each new section—is a structure that the text sources from Catholicism—a tradition that the novel connects both to the production of archives and the potential erasure of indigenous (Mairum) knowledges. Although the text’s four main sections—Antífona, Homilia, Canon, and Corpus—are named with terms Darcy borrows from the Catholic liturgy, the novel recognizes Catholic frameworks as exerting force on the form and overall structure of the text while also setting these up as part of a ‘dominant’ archival structure that the text looks to interrogate. The tension between Catholic and Mairum ways of knowing and being in the world forms a crucial concern for much of the novel and is a tension the novel foregrounds by way of frequently juxtaposing the aldeia and the Catholic Mission established nearby.

Founded with the expressed purpose of evangelizing the Mairum, the Mission appears as a parched, white-washed, and sanitized place devoid of life—a place where Mairum children are taken to forget their culture. The Catholic liturgy—the source for the novel’s section titles—is specifically portrayed as participating in this process. One chapter, for example, recounts a mass taking place as part of what appears to be a typical school day at the Mission: the description paints the mass as a repetitive ritual void of meaning, but also suggests that it participates in emptying the subjects who sit in the pews—largely indigenous children from the aldeia and other nearby communities. Another scene associates the Mission with the re-education of indigenous subjects: A group of Mairum woman gather outside a window where Isaías/Avá is seated with two priests, rip their clothes, wail in morning, and plea with Isaías/Avá to rescue their children. The Padres and others who witness the scene from inside the Mission are described as frightened and scandalized—the nun serving tea rushes to hide the silver, one of the priests recoils and covers his ears, and Alma calls the scene “horrendous”—but the audience inside the Mission also subjects the women’s performance to a gross misreading. Where they see a scandalous and sexualized display, Isaías/Avá sees a ritual of mourning and an urgent call to action by desperate mothers interceding on behalf of their children and their cultural survival.

If the Mission is depicted as the setting for the violent re-education of the coming Mairum generation and the potential erasure of Mairum knowledges, it is also the space in the novel most closely aligned with archive. Along with the references to the mapas antigos used to legitimize the Mission’s seizure of indigenous lands, the novel alludes to a “Manual de Etnografia Mairum” that two of the priests at the Mission have been working diligently to produce. Although made obliquely and in passing, references to Padre Aquino and Padre Vecchio’s Manual suggest a massive, still unfinished project that has consumed years of the men’s lives and aspires to bring together a comprehensive, textual compendium of Mairum life. In a chapter in which we overhear a private conversation between the two priests—the novel depicts it like a transcript of dialogue between Padres Aquino and Vecchio, marking each block of speech with the speaker’s name and a colon—the priests paint the project as hopeless, wondering aloud if their continued attempts to bring their ethnographic collection to completion are but products of their selfish desires and pretense for prolonging their stay in Brazil and avoiding a return to Italy. Their conversation wanders over the course of the chapter, but they circle back to these anxieties and count the Manual among their attempts to create a lasting sense of accomplishment, especially with regard to their evangelization efforts with the Mairum and their continued hopes for Isaías/Avá to become a priest and missionary. In this context, Maíra positions their ethnographic collection at a tension between securing a written archive of Mairum culture that the priests hope will endure and extinguishing the Mairum beliefs and lifeways that the Padres deem heathen. As if to emphasize the Manual’s
place within this larger project where archive and annihilation collide, a mass plays in the background of the Padre’s conversation like an inferred soundtrack, at times interrupting with the swell of an organ or an invitation to prayer.

When the *Manual* makes another appearance in *Maira*—this time in a section of free indirect discourse from Isaías/Avá—it figures as a project shaped by preoccupations with “the relation between arrested life and absolute, ‘completed,’ knowledge” that Susan Stewart associates with the collection (56-7). For Stewart, collections infer—even create—structures of meaning through form: they not only accumulate and organize materials, but more importantly bear the marks of subjectivities and longings, especially the desire to simulate structure, permanence, and control in the object world. For this reason, Stewart emphasizes that collections function as “systems of objects” and structures of “enclosure”—we might recall Diana Taylor’s link between archives and capture here—showing that they gather and arrange disparate materials in ways that work to ‘arrest’ ‘representative’ bits of life and reframe these within a particular organizing logic (161, 151). In the process of grouping, arranging, and classifying their contents, collections “striv[e] for authenticity and closure,” Stewart shows, in that they close off worlds that seem complete and knowable (151, 56-7).

Inferring this connection between accumulation and containment in relationship to ethnographic collection, Isaías/Avá’s thoughts on the *Manual* figure the project as a knowledge-collecting practice that aims to constitute the illusion of a collectable cultural totality—i.e., grasping the ‘whole’ of Mairum culture through collecting its ‘parts.’ Thinking of Padre Aquino about midway through the novel, Isaías/Avá wonders, “Que será dele, com sua obsessão de escrever e continuar reescrivendo, ano após ano, o Manual de Etnografia Mairum com mais detalhes e mais sabedoria que qualquer outro? Saberia padre Aquino a metade daquilo sobre seus calabreses?” (“What will become of him, with his obsession to write and continue rewriting, year after year, the Mairum Ethnography Manual, with more detail and more knowledge than any other? Could Father Aquino possibly know half as much about his Calabreses?”) (215). In Isaías/Avá’s reading, the *Manual* is fueled by obsession, in particular an obsession to accumulate knowledge (“sabadoria”) about a culture that the priest looks to master; Padre Aquino writes and rewrites not as a pretense, but because he is fixated with accumulating “sabedoria” and attempting to produce the authoritative, ethnographic guide to the Mairum. Moreover, Isaías/Avá refers to this project not as an *etnografia* or text (like the priests do), but as a *manual*, which implies that the project aims to result in a guidebook or reference work; that is, even if the padres envision their ethnographic work as intensely personal—they talk about it as if they were assembling a private collection of Mairum ethnographic materials shaped exclusively by their own nostalgia and desires—they also engage in collecting and structuring these materials in a way that aims to make Mairum culture accessible and readable—or at least for an audience who reads like them. In Isaías/Avá’s mind, the *Manual* represents the padres’ attempt to collect the ‘whole’ of Mairum culture and create a repository of Mairum knowledge—one that will presumably be sent to Italy or held at the Mission or State archive, perhaps even next to the *mapas antigos* said to be stored there.

**Take a look: Re-reading Archive**

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12 It is worth noting that Stewart follows Baudrillard in making a distinction between sheer accumulation and collection. See *On Longing.*
If *Mairá* gestures toward the way Mairum knowledges are being collected and converted into the stuff of archive, the novel also disrupts our ability to pass over this archive without re-reading. At multiple points, the novel simulates a look into a collection of ethnographic texts that it then borrows from, re-configures, and re-examines. In the process, it probes the assumption that a collection of ethnographic materials like the *Manual* can represent a monolithic or stable store of texts and meanings that fit neatly within the structure into which they have been placed. In the case of the *Manual*, for example, the organizing principles behind the priests’ collection—the ‘logics’ Stewart would have us think about—are presumably Catholic ones—ones the text aligns with the evangelization of the Mairum. With the introduction of Isaías/Avá’s perspective on the project, however, *Mairá* seems to wonder whether the *Manual*’s contents should be read primarily within that framework. The novel’s own makeup hints at this by staging an explicit dissonance between its myriad contents and its outer (Catholic) structure; the text contains a series of chapters that specifically invite indigenous texts and ways of knowing into the space of the novel. The second section of the novel, *Homilia*, is interspersed with chapters dedicated to Mairum cosmology. For every few chapters that focus on the happenings at the *aldeia* or Mission, there is a freestanding chapter that interjects to contribute one installment in a series of six Mairum cosmology narratives, starting with a creation narrative. The first of these chapters recounts creation as the act of a god “sem-nome” who makes the world by blowing into a conch shell, then fails at his numerous attempts to sculpt viable humans before he creates the first descendants of the Mairum, “a gente verdadeira” (133). Many others follow the antics of the sun and moon gods, Maíra and Micura, charting their coming-of-age from mischievous twin brothers with a penchant for squabbling and recklessly toying with their powers, to their eventual transformation into the guardians of the Mairum. Although the twins never shed their playfulness, the series of narratives highlights their central role in Mairum cosmology by showing them repeatedly coming to the aid of the Mairum and using their powers to intervene on their behalf. The twins often rebel against their father and use their ability to “fazer qualquer coisa”—to make anything at all—to improve on his creations, especially in ways that improve living conditions for the Mairum (163). They alter the landscape and refashion the Mairum bodies to be more functional. Maíra, whom we know in the larger context of the novel as the central god for the Mairum, specifically teaches them to build structures and hunt and defends them when other deities seek to bring about their ruin.13

The novel introduces the Mairum cosmology narratives in the mode of an alternate, oral history and positions them to clash sharply with Catholic pieces of the text. Often the cosmology chapters come bookmarked between chapters that reproduce Catholic prayers and recount communion rituals and masses (usually in Latin), so that the Mairum narratives are put in tension with the chapters on either side of them—a move that also builds conflict into the structure of the novel itself. At the same time that the novel formally draws out this tension between indigenous and Catholic world-views, it employs the series of cosmology chapters to draw attention to Mairum ways of knowing and telling, suggesting the traces that these deposit in the ethnographic archive. There are six chapters in this series, all of which are narrated in an omniscient voice and severed from a specified narrative situation. Once again, *Mairá* incorporates them without explicitly marking who is narrating the chapters, to

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13 See Sá for a comparative analysis that shows how the Mairum cosmology Darcy constructs in these chapters mimics cosmological narratives that he collected in his ethnographic fieldwork.
whom, or for what purpose, but it arranges the chapters like installments in an oral history, inflecting them with both marks of an ethnographic frame and traces of a Mairum voice.

The first of the chapters opens with a line of italicized text consistent with the bits of Mairum language sprinkled throughout the novel, starting the series with a graphic reminder of Mairum voice and priming us to think about the impressions it might leave in the text that follows. “Ñanderuvuçu ou petei, pytu avy tepy añou ojicuãa,” it reads, reproducing a line that Darcy borrows from Curt Nimuendajú’s collection of Apapokuva-Guarani texts (133). Positioned just below the chapter heading, the line works in the mode of an epigraph; it suggests an initial inscription, an opening writing gesture that frames the narrative below and anticipates the series of cosmology chapters as possibly carrying inflections of the Mairum voice that seems to trail off when the line and italics end. It also prefigures the text presented below—the Mairum creation narrative in Portuguese—as a translation and a mediated text. Before we start reading the creation narrative, the italicized line of Mairum serves as a brief but crucial reminder: we are reading the product of someone reading (and writing) the words of someone else.

Then, in the final moments of “Maíra and Micura,” the last chapter in this six-chapter set, a first-person voice breaks through the detached, omniscient one that walks us through the cosmology chapters. “Hoje nós mandamos, temos os melhores enfeites e nos pintamos mais que elas com urucum e jenipapo,” the male narrator says, ending a cautionary tale of female power that he uses to affirm the restoration of patriarchal ‘order’ that the god Maíra helped orchestrate (210). “É bom viver como ensinou Maíra,” (“It’s good to live as Maíra instructed”), the narrator says as he moves to make a string of connections between the cosmology narratives and present-day Mairum practices, touching on gender roles, daily routines, and more (210). The moment signals not only an abrupt move from the omniscient—some scholars say ‘mythic’—voice featured in the cosmology chapters into the first-person nós, but also infers at least two possible frames for reading the cosmology series/chapters (210). The shift in voice is noticeably sudden, like an eruption of voice, and foregrounds the (unnamed) Mairum speaker and his role in what can look like an ethnographic exchange focused on Mairum cosmology. If we think back to the italicized epigraph that opens the first chapter in the cosmology series, the shift serves to close the series with a reminder that someone has been speaking all along. At the same time, it interpolates different sets of possible narrative situations, cultivating a critical indeterminacy in the text.

One possibility—especially if we read the series alongside Maíra’s allusions to the Manual—is that the chapters arise from an ethnographic context or re-collect narratives from some sort of ethnographic collection. There is a sense that the novel could be collecting the kinds of narratives we might expect to find in the Manual de Etnografia, presenting us with pieces extracted from the archive and inserting these into a new context. Especially since the cosmology chapters end with some closing, more holistic comments about Mairum beliefs and

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14 Sá traces this opening quote back to Curt Nimuendajú’s collection. See Rainforest Literatures. One of Darcy’s points of contention with the Museu Nacional that famously culminated in a heated exchange with director Roberto da Matta in the 1970s revolved around Nimuendajú’s body of ethnographic work; Darcy claimed that the Museu had neglected Nimuendajú’s invaluable texts in the museum’s archive. Interestingly, the FUNAI online library now carries the name of the German-Brazilian ethnologist.

15 This passage comes within the context of a cautionary tale about female power. After the gods conspire to destroy the Mairum by giving the Mairum women a magical flute that allows them absolute control, Maíra intervenes to restore patriarchal ‘order.’

16 The term is Emery’s, but Sá reads the creation series as carrying a similar inflection.
practices, we might posit that the narratives were prompted by someone asking not only “What stories are important to you (the Mairum)?” but also “How do you understand these stories?” and “How do they fit together?” The six chapters we are given in the novel would then represent the ordered sequence of collected responses, fit within an ethnographer’s frame and organizing logic that attempt to encompass and explain an entire set of Mairum practices. Although they could be lifted from the pages of the *Manual*, the chapters could also be the product of the ethnographer (presumably a semi-autobiographical Darcy), who makes a single, brief appearance in the “Egosum” chapter positioned—not arbitrarily—at the very heart of the novel and in the middle of the cosmology chapter sequence.

And yet, *Maíra* severs the cosmology narratives from context, presenting them as a set of narrative units that stand alone and stand out. Even within such a heterogeneous and polyphonic novel, the cosmology series is noticeably distinct, interjecting a series of chapters narrated in their entirety from “an exclusively indigenous point of view” into the novel (Sá 154). We could read the narratives as units of ethnographic data bound by the collection (the text implies that they have been collected, transcribed, translated, assembled into a particular order, etc), in which case they can appear ‘captured,’ ‘arrested’ within the organizing structures and logics of the ethnographic collection. But *Maíra*, by drawing attention to traces of Mairum voice and ways of knowing in the cosmology chapters, gestures toward the possibility that the narratives excerpt a tradition that we could find in the archive, but one which the text will not concede as bound by it. We can, for example, speculate that Isaías/Avá is the narrator behind these stories—the priests cast him as their ideal informant and *Maíra* frequently figures him like a compendium of Mairum and Catholic texts. Even then, the novel allows us the flexibility to insert the narratives within multiple contexts, problematizing their status as ‘captured’ in the archive: the narratives could be excerpted from the *Manual*, but they could also reproduce the repertoire of stories that Isaías/Avá tells as he canoes up the river with Alma on his return to the *aldeia*. Although Alma listens in—she accompanies him from Rio to the *aldeia*—the novel integrates Isaías/Avá’s act of narration within a scene that links story-telling and remembrance. In the process of re-collecting and articulating “mitos . . . e velhas histórias,” he is described as relearning the intricacies of the River and retracing the landscape of his childhood, as well as recovering Mairum knowledge when he remembers how to canoe and fish like he had before he was taken to Rome (181). The “mitos . . . e velhas histórias” that Isaías/Avá tells might not be the same as the cosmology narratives that *Maíra* includes, but the novel nonetheless gestures to the possibility and constructs him as a guardian of stories, the keeper of an archive of Mairum narratives and knowledges (181).

Whether or not the cosmology chapters were told in response to an ethnographic inquiry, the text questions whether they constitute contents that the collection arrests and holds captive. *Maíra* does not place the creation chapters squarely within either of these two contexts—the written archive of the *Manual* or the oral archive that Isaías/Avá recites—and, in doing so, builds several ways of reading into the text. We can read the narratives within the framework of the ethnographic archive but simultaneously read them outside or against it. If anything, the cosmology chapters rattle against the novel’s Catholic framework, bringing

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17 Haydée Ribeiro Coelho notes another possible connection between Isaías/Avá and the cosmology series. When he finds himself in Brasília, waiting to return to the Amazon region and the *aldeia* from his time in Rome, Isaías/Avá notices a shift in the stories that come to his mind: “Brasília me devolve aos mairuns, aos nossos mitos de criação,” he states (in Coelho 420).
out a clash between the text’s (Catholic) exterior structure and its (sometimes indigenous) contents, asking us to look further than the text’s exterior structure. The chapters come interspersed throughout the Homilia section, named for an interpretive portion in the liturgy meant to guide a congregation through reading and interpreting a Biblical passage—a reference that suggests interpretation bound by structures of authority, that is, normative reading. And yet, it is within this section in particular that the novel makes space for a Mairum re-telling of the universe. By positioning these Mairum cosmology fragments up against Catholic practices and yet within the Catholic framework of the overall novel, Maira poses a conflict between the text’s structure of authority and the materials that it houses, suggesting that the cosmology chapters are poised to interrupt and open up the text’s framework and organizing logic. In this way, Maira builds a counter-reading inside the novel and locates within itself a counter-archive of sorts.

Os sos índios: Mobilizing the Reader in the (Ethnographic) Archive

Alongside the way it positions Mairum creation and cosmology narratives as counter-archive, Maira at times experiments with using the novel like a different kind of collection site, compiling ethnographic descriptions of a range of Mairum practices, including funeral ceremonies and rites-of-passage in ways that further complicate the image of archive as holding structure or static repository. Although the Mairum chieftain Anacã is buried a few pages into the novel, Maira’s treatment of his funeral and bones in particular becomes an experiment in archival re-collecting. Anacã’s death and body form the focal point for another string of chapters in the novel, this one following a sequence of Mairum ceremonies and rites-of-passage in a way that positions readers much like fieldworkers engaged in observing and documenting cultural practices in a specified site. The opening scene in the sequence moves to accumulate what looks like ethnographic description while depicting a communal gathering that the aging Anacã has called to announce his impending death. “A casa-dos-homens ferve de gente: homens, mulheres, crianças. Vivos e mortos. Todos os mairuns estão aqui,” (“The casa-dos-homens seethes with people: men, women, children. The living and the dead. All of the Mairum are here.”) the first line of the chapter reads, introducing a spatial marker it will repeat frequently throughout the chapter—the word “aqui” (37). One passing comment offers us a momentary glance at the larger cultural geographies in which the casa and this particular occasion figure, informing us that the gathering allows us to participate in a certain kind of transgression: only ranking males are apparently welcomed into the house except on important ceremonial occasions. The narrative overall, however, positions readers as members of the crowd called together by Anacã for reasons that no one seems to know. “Ele terá alguma coisa muito importante a dizer!” (“He must have something important to say!”) the text exclaims at one point, including readers in the general sense of confusion and leaving them to puzzle over the tuxuaí’s call to gather (37).

The line “todos estão aqui” becomes a refrain in the chapter that inserts Mairum subjects—and lots of them—into the space of the casa-dos-homens, performing a kind of narrative fleshing-out of the hand-sketched map included earlier in the text. This is a scene crowded with bodies, palpably infused with the heat they emit; the casa-dos-homens is depicted here as on the verge of boiling over, warmed to the extreme by the multitude that has gathered in the ceremonial space at the core of the Mairum aldeia. In this sense, the narrative enters the ceremonial space pictured in the Aldeia Mairum map and fills it with Mairum subjects—bodies that are crowding one another, warm, anxious, alert, listening. But the
narrative goes about experimenting with ways to interpolate readers within this “aqui” as well. By repeatedly marking the place where the Mairum gather as ‘aqui’—right here—and using present-tense verbs almost exclusively, the narrative situates readers in the midst of the flurry of activity, as if they, too, were jammed into the casa-dos-homens with a crowd that the narrative tells us, quite matter-of-factly, consists of all the Mairuns, both living and dead. In this way, the scene is told largely as if readers were physically present—a narrative technique repeated frequently in the chapters of the novel that take up a particular Mairum ritual as their focus—so that the action appears to unfold in real-time and the narrative works horizontally, positioning readers alongside the Mairum characters; reminded over and over, readers are “aqui”—right here—alongside “todos os mairuns” (37).

The novel situates this sequence of chapters specifically at the tension between archive and annihilation that the text ponders elsewhere. Anacã’s (the tuxaua or chieftain’s) death, as the genealogia puts at issue, is figured in the novel as an event that produces uncertainty for the Mairum community, and it is one that the text evokes throughout to problematize a narrative of Mairum disintegration. Yet it is interesting that Maíra mobilizes an ethnographic mode precisely in the face of this event. As the text moves through Anacã’s announcement and the scene of his death—he dies asleep in his hammock that night—it also accumulates ethnographic descriptions and increasingly embeds readers like fieldworkers, interpolating them as observers witnessing a Mairum practice in an immediate moment in time and space, simulating “the highly situated nature of ethnographic description—this ethnographer, in this time, in this place. . .” (Geertz 5). As the novel moves into describing Anacã’s funeral rites and burial, the text begins to insert the temporal marker “agora” alongside the already-established spatial designation “aqui”: as readers, we are not only “right here” with the Mairum community, but “right now.” In this sense, the funeral scenes play out in a way that seems designed to produce a readerly experience of ‘being there’—what Clifford Geertz theorizes as the experience ethnographers strive to capture and convey on paper, that of having been physically present and immersed in a cultural world which they then describe and make accessible to us through writing.\(^\text{18}\)

The text augments this effect in part by building a markedly detailed account of how the Mairum treat Anacã’s body and prepare it for burial, presenting a description that rhetorically seems geared toward accumulating information and producing an ethnographic account of the funeral rites. After Anacã’s body is moved and prepared for burial by male members of his clan, it is painted with thin stripes of reddish urucum-pigment that stretch from his neck to his feet. His face is covered with the bluish-black extracted from green jenipapo fruit. One ãtã shell is placed over each of his closed eyes, and his body is embellished with what the text presents as an extensive list of adornments, each article corresponding to a precise area of the body. The description in Maíra comes heavy with adjectives and tends toward long lists of steps and modes of ornamentation, as if the text were leaning toward poetic catalog or rhetorically attempting to take it all in. Like Jaguar, Teró, and the other members of the Mairum community who participate in preparing Anacã’s body, the language of the text works “devagar” here, slowly amassing particulars (39). It details colors, procedural steps, how each part of Anacã’s body is attended to and prepared for burial. In the process, the narrative voice works to mimic the attention it observes in the rituals themselves while translating these into a written account and crafting the text like a repository of ethnographic details.

\(^{18}\) See Geertz’ theory developed in Works and Lives, especially the opening chapter.
Like the creation narratives, this depiction of Anacã’s funeral rites receives little attention in readings of *Maira* except as supporting the leitmotif of mourning for the Mairum that scholars read in the novel or as a moment of ethnographic mimesis—one when Darcy’s novel mimics Darcy’s ethnography. The scene in which Anacã’s body is painstakingly painted and prepared for burial, for example, receives occasional mention mainly for reproducing a pivotal ethnographic encounter that Darcy had when he was sent to Mato Grosso as an SPI ethnographer (and Marechal Rondon’s proxy) in order to document the funeral rites of a Bororo chieftain.20 The almost excruciating level of detail in the scene recalls Darcy’s description of the Bororo ceremony—he tended to call it “o ceremonial fúnebre mais elaborado que existe” (“the most elaborate funeral ceremony that exists”)—but the string of Anacã chapters in *Maira* also rewrite this ethnographic encounter as a possibility to stage a process of ethnographic collection and create the conditions for a critical readerly practice (*Confissões* 150). Throughout, *Maira* generates a line of inquiry about the stuff of archive (maps, anthropological diagrams, oral histories) and contemplates the politics that shape how archives get produced, interpreted, and employed (the *senador’s* expansionist project, the priests’ *Manual*, for example). As much as we can read the funeral scenes as having a mimetic relationship with Darcy’s accounts of the Bororo ceremonies, the novel works to insert readers—rather emphatically—within an ethnographic scenario and to embed us within the collection process that the funeral scenes stage. The question is therefore not so much how *Maira* reproduces Darcy’s experiences within the space of the novel, but why does the text position us as ‘being there’? If we can chart the Anacã chapters as plotting a series of moments into the text that seem to invite us to inhabit the position of ethnographers, the novel also seems to be asking, “What will you do with this position?”

We can imagine the grave of the Mairum chieftain as the kind of site that might be excavated for bones or artifacts, mined for objects that could then be shipped to the museum and stored in the kinds of archives that preoccupy Taylor, or held up in the personal collections or curiosity cabinets that Stewart interprets as working “within a mode of control and confinement” (161). When reading through the detailed descriptions of the funeral rites and ceremonies (almost six chapters worth), we might also imagine the elation of an ethnographer at her impeccable timing: the opportunity to be present at these ceremonies, the text suggests (especially stylistically through its language of accumulation), means having the chance to study and accumulate the details of an entire procession of rituals set in motion by the chieftain’s death. For the participant observer, ‘being there’ means having the chance to collect and move these practices to text, to write and make them accessible to other readerships and available for incorporation within an ethnographic archive.

*Maira*, however, plots Anacã’s bones and grave at an intersection of archival practices. If we are positioned like ethnographers observing and collecting in the funeral scenes, then the text takes pains to remind us that members of the Mairum community are simultaneously engaged in tapping into and performing their own archive of practices. After Anacã’s initial

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19 Emery, for example, refers in passing to Anacã’s funeral ceremony as producing a leitmotif for Mairum detrivialization and reads the funeral’s presence in the text as a “lament that takes the place of the prescribed ritual of mourning. . .”. This implies that the novel works through substitution, inserting a lament in place of ‘the real’ indigenous ritual (97 my emphasis).

20 Marechal Rondon founds the SPI in 1910, and Darcy counts him among his most important mentors. The Bororo funeral sequence makes one of many appearances in Darcy’s body of work in *Confissões*, and it forms the subject of a thirty-five millimeter film Darcy made with the community’s permission and distributed through the *Museu do Índio* in the 1940s.
burial, the text circles back repeatedly to the chieftain’s grave. Six chapters in the Antífonas section open on the site, as the novel repeatedly reroutes the narrative to make a visit, thus plotting the chieftain’s grave as a site of remembrance in the text itself. In some cases, these visits are brief—a quick stopover that locates readers back within the aldeia after the novel has made geographic jumps to the Mission, Rio de Janeiro, or Rome. In each case, however, the visits lead into moments when the novel connects the grave to a repertoire of Mairum practices. We observe the daily sequence that plays out when groups of Mairum women tend Anacã’s grave and saturate it with jugs full of water that they pull from the nearby lagoon—a ritual apparently done to hasten the decomposition process. When friends visit to update Anacã on the day’s events, we are made to overhear their conversations, and the novel often pauses on the grave to remind us that the smell that permeates the site “Não é um fedor de carniça de bicho morto ou de defunto desenterrado. É um cheiro agudo como ponta de flecha. . .” (55). Sometimes the novel wanders from Anacã’s grave into the forest or into another part of the aldeia like a meandering visitor. Where it wanders after the stopovers at the grave—and where these chapters ultimately locate us—always involves a description of another Mairum ritual in the process of unfolding, however. The Nandeíara chapter has us observe a naming and tattoo ceremony, Javari a competitive fighting performance, and the Sucurúdjaréda and Jurupari chapters walk us through Mairum rites of passage.

In the process of interpolating our participation and compiling these descriptions, the text wonders how the Mairum community will respond to the death of the tuxuã and lack of a clear successor, but it also constructs Anacã’s death as a memory catalyst for the Mairum community. When they exhume Anacã’s grave in order to clean and decorate the bones before their final burial in the lagoon, the novel dedicates pages to detailing the subsequent rituals. Much like the first funeral scene, this one positions readers as if they were observing the ritual in action, though this time a first-person narrator prefaces the description by commenting on its significance “para nós mairuns”—“for us, the Mairum” (119). After walking us through the exhumation process, the description turns its attentions to the bones that have been re-collected from Anacã’s grave and paints a scene where Taylor’s categories of archive and repertoire seem to collide:

Os homens, mulheres e crianças de cada clã, sentados juntos no canto do baíto que lhes corresponde, começam o trabalho delicadíssimo de recamar, amorosamente, os ossos grandes e pequenos com minúsculas plumas de cores, imbricando umas nas outras como se escamadas nos pássaros vivos. À medida que avança o trabalho primorosíssimo, as mulheres vão chorando ao ritmo marcado pelo pequeno maraca do aroe. Ora choram baixinho, um choro lamuriento, cantado (121).

This account, heavy with superlatives, contemplates the “delicadíssimo,” “primorosíssimo” work that the families undertake as they prepare each of Anacã’s bones and, in the process, places one of the “supposedly enduring materials” that Taylor associates with traditional archives at the center of a scene of embodied practice (19). As the passage continues, it returns again and again to describing the bones’ transformation as if they were being remade into live birds. In the text’s account, they change from smooth-surfaced and shiny-white to feathered and vibrant with color. In turn, the first-person narrator characterizes the exhumation of Anacã’s grave as a process that imbues his bones with a kind
of new life and the chieftain’s bones as mobilizing a series of practices. He describes how the community revives “velhas danças quasi esquecidas, que nenhum jovem havia visto” in Anacã’s honor and fills the patio with dishes for the funeral feast. Elders teach the children dances while explaining the stories of how they came to learn them, and “os mais velhos recordam com carinho velhas histórias daqueles bisavós esquecidos que sobreviverão nas crianças” (58).  

Meanwhile, the text continues to interpolate us within an ethnographic scenario in these scenes, yet explicitly marks these rituals as part of someone else’s archive. In the context of another chapter structured much like an ethnographic encounter between readers and the Mairum, the brief mention of the rituals’ significance “para nós mairuns”—“for us, the Mairum”—for example, could imply that we are participating in an ethnographic inquiry in process, collecting information about the rituals being performed from an informant. But it simultaneously can be read as a moment when the text emphasizes the funeral’s position within an archive/collection of practices enacted by and for “nós mairuns” (119). Accounts of these practices might find their way into our ethnographic archive, Maíra implies, but here they appear far from ‘captured’ or ‘arrested’ within it.

Reading and Re-collecting the Archive

What happens if we take the archive’s tendency toward ‘capture’ (Taylor) or ‘arrest’ (Stewart) in tandem with its status as a consigned collection—the product of a gathering process that aims at unity but always, necessarily, produces a stratified site that houses multiple, superimposed impressions and traces? Throughout, Maíra presents as a gathering—a text made out of re-collected and pieced-together materials that the novel appears to borrow from the ethnographer’s sketchbook, the State and Mission archives, and the fieldworker’s account of observed rituals, among others. In the process, the novel stages a look into a series of archives whose myriad contents push against readers’ ability to unite the novel’s many pieces into a coherent whole or unified system. Maíra not only extracts and re-collects from the archive; it also structures a reading practice. Readers have to try to make sense of the gathering of documents and materials that the text brings together, flipping back and forth between sections in order to follow the multiple storylines or attempt to find some relationship between the whole of the text and its many parts. We might flip to the index of chapters when the narrative makes an abrupt shift in location or genre, moving from Rio to the aldeia or from a government document to an ethnographic description—What has come before? How do these relate? We flip back to the kinship chart when we are introduced to characters

21 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to develop an argument about the tension between ethnographic and forensic collection practices in Maíra, but I find it worth noting that the scene of Anacã’s exhumation counters a second exhumation that takes place in the text—the exhumation of Alma, the carioca who follows Isaías/Avá to the aldeia and ‘goes native.’ Whereas Maíra contemplates Anacã’s grave as a site where repertoire gets mobilized, it frames Alma’s within the context of a police investigation and the production of a rather different kind of collection practice. When Inspector Nonato gives his account of exhuming Alma’s grave (it comes in the form of a first-person report), the novel constructs it like a ransacking. Nonato carelessly breaks things, steals a necklace that he deems an exceptional piece of Mairum handiwork, and keeps Alma’s skull after haphazardly returning the rest of her body to the grave. He admits that the skull carries no marks or evidence that could help him solve the case, but appears later in the novel on the front page of a Rio newspaper, cradling it in an outstretched palm. Nonato’s carelessness contrasts sharply with the cautious, delicadíssimo labor of the Mairum families described in the novel. While they excavate Anacã’s grave, then collect and prepare his bones ‘amorosamente,’ Nonato treats Alma’s grave as a joint forensic site and treasure trove of curiosities.
living in the Mairum aldeia—Who is who? The novel’s experimental form both prompts these kinds of questions and tends to produce indeterminate and indefinite answers. As readers, we must search through the text like an archive, rifling through the collection of materials that it houses and laboring through a text that disrupts our ability to unite the novel into “a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (Derrida 3). Instead, Maíra draws attention to its own gathering practice, working in fragmented, borrowed bits and pieces that it re-configures and re-inscribes, all the while demanding that readers rely on a combination of recall and rummage.

In the process, Maíra foregrounds the reader’s role in producing and actively making meaning with the materials gleaned from the archive—the archive is always produced more than recovered and therefore is subject to constant, inconclusive re-readings, the novel suggests. But Maíra also constructs the archive as an unruly site. The final chapter, “Indez,” reads like an archive about to burst at the seams. In a kind of heightened form of the re-collective practice the text performs throughout, the last chapter gathers together the fractured bits of almost every storyline, character, and type of text or material that has made an appearance in the novel up to this point. We start with a line that promises to tell a clear story (“Dóia eu vou contar uma coisa procê”), but the chapter carries us instead through pages of fragmented, oblique conversations and exchanges that are compressed together into one solid block of text. We read parts of a telegraph transcript littered with stops (“câmbios”), then an excerpted telephone exchange between friends who discuss the news of Alma’s death and the shocking, front-page photograph of a police Inspector grasping her exhumed skull that they saw that morning. We learn about the Epaxâ’s displacement and Isaías/Avá’s work translating the New Testament into Mairum. We see documents and overhear bickering between government officials about the future of the Mairum territories and learn that Padres Vecchio, Aquino, and a number of others at the Mission have died. (The text implies that they have been victim of an uprising or foul play.) Throughout, the chapter intersperses pieces of lover’s discourse—promises to meet soon by the riverbank and italicized declarations of love that move between Portuguese and Mairum.

The novel re-collects these but hesitates to complete or connect them. Like Maíra has done throughout, the final chapter consigns, but it also suggests that it cannot contain. Displaying an intense level of visual and verbal density, the “Indez” chapter reads as one, solid paragraph that goes on for pages and pages. It contains no paragraph breaks or indentations, no quotation marks, dashes, or other graphical marks to register where one conversation, fragment, or voice ends and another begins. The novel provides no narrator to intervene and provide context, frame, or organize the chapter in any way, and instead every voice enters and deposits a section onto the page. The chapter reads like an overcrowded space made out of these layers of text that are constantly piling up one on top of another, ending the novel with a chapter that visually stocks and accumulates a kind of “archival strata” (Derrida 22). More than a coherent or unitary collection, Maíra presents us with a final chapter made out of the assorted and miscellaneous, the fragmented and incomplete, the

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22 For Antônio Candido, as well as many other scholars, the final chapter creates a certain wrap up for the novel. Candido in particular reads the chapter as employing a democratizing narrative technique in that it joins “brancos e índios na sua humanidade comum” (385). Other scholars cite the “Indez” chapter as an example of Bakhtinian heteroglossia to the extreme. See, for example, Sandra Guardini T. Vasconcelos, who claims that the final chapter turns into “um coro de vozes, amarrando todos os fios soltos e constituindo-se em um fluxo de consciência coletivo e exemplo magistral de que Bakhtin chamou de heteroglossia” (206).
superimposed and the stratified, ending the novel by enacting archive not as a closed or controllable system, but as a structure that houses an excess.
Chapter Four

With and Without Quotation Marks: Ethnography as Citation in Los indios de México

A massive, five-volume series comprising twenty years of fieldwork and totaling nearly three thousand pages, Fernando Benítez’ Los indios de México looks like a work of encyclopedic proportions. The five, hefty volumes, published between 1967 and 1980, stretch across the bookshelf, their sheer span serving as a visual reminder of the expanse of geographic and cultural terrains that the series attempts to cover as it compiles entries on nearly a dozen indigenous groups across Mexico. The first volume opens in the northern state of Chihuahua with Benítez’ study of a Tarahumara community in the Sierra Madre Occidental mountains, then moves southeast to cover Tzotzil and Tzeltal communities in Chiapas before ending in Oaxaca and Guerrero with entries on the Mixtecos. The second volume, Tomo II, focuses on Huichol groups exclusively, but it likewise takes readers across a span of western states and brings together an eclectic set of chapters that blend ethnography, historical and travel writing, and feature journalism—the genre that Benítez is best known for.¹ In Tomo II, Benítez’ extensive research on the hallucinogenic peyote cactus and Huichol spirituality sits alongside numerous ethnographic accounts, interviews, collected stories, and oral histories. The volume includes Benítez’ retelling of the desert pilgrimage that he takes with a troupe of shamans to make contact with the venado-peyote deity; a case-study of Pedro de Haro, who travels to the Mexican capital invoking Article 123 of the Constitution to secure official land titles for aggrieved families in his community; and an assortment of first-person testimonies from Huichol individuals speaking to the effects of mass displacement and failed agricultural reform in the region. By the time we reach Tomo V, with chapters on Tepehuan and Nahua communities in southern Durango, we have crisscrossed the country collecting not only Benítez’ first-person accounts of the places and indigenous communities that he visits, but also pages of voices in citation—pages of Benítez’ ‘sources’ talking and telling stories that appear in the form of direct quotations.

Citation—as a practice of excerpting and quoting sources, as well as foregrounding the presence of multiple voices and presences within the ethnographic text—thus emerges as a central problematic in Benítez’ series. Benítez travels with an audio recorder and a varying circle of photographer friends and affiliates with the Instituto Nacional Indigenista who photograph alongside him and help make recordings of the voices that enter and inform

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¹ Benítez’ journalism career starts in the 1930s at El Nacional, and he later works on publications including Novedades and Siempre. He is especially well known for writing and editing pieces on the student protests and Tlatelolco massacre. See Claire Brewster “The Student Movement of 1968 and the Mexican Press,” as well as Federico Campbell’s interview with Benítez published in Conversaciones con escritores. Benítez acknowledged his work as an ‘etnólogo’ but demonstrated an ambivalent relationship to the title: “Gracias, pero yo soy periodista,” he is quoted as saying upon receiving the Premio Nacional de Literatura de Antropología. See the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes’ “Semblanza de Fernando Benítez” online, as well as Abida Ventura’s article “Fernando Benítez, el periodista antropólogo” in El Universal.
Benítez’ texts. Using the camera and tape-recorder to record what he sees and hears in the field represents an urgent, if ethically-charged activity for Benítez. He often alludes to the devices’ similar capability to produce surviving records of indigenous cultural practices that he fears threatened: “Debemos pues emprender una marcha contra el reloj, como pedía Jacques Soustelle. . . pues mañana será demasiado tarde,” he writes in Tomo III (1970), invoking Gertrude Blom’s inspiration to study the Lacandon and reiterating a concern with ‘salvage’ ethnography shared among many of his colleagues and collaborators (III, 286). At the same time, Benítez openly questions (not unlike Darcy Ribeiro and Mário de Andrade) what it means to produce ethnographic records of indigenous practices to then store and study. ¿Por qué estudiamos a los indígenas? —Why do we study the indios?— he asks repeatedly throughout the series, and while he opens this for debate, he seems just as concerned with how ethnographers study indigenous cultures, including the technologies and kinds of devices that they use to record and circulate the materials that they collect in indigenous communities.

When Benítez travels by plane to conduct fieldwork with the Huichol for the first time, he studies the grainy, black-and-white photographs of Huichol subjects that illustrate his copy of Carl Lumholtz’ El México desconocído with a critical eye: “la cámara del explorador noruego tenía la peculiaridad de arrebatarles a los indios su belleza reduciéndoles a meros fantasmas de sí mismos,” he writes, contemplating the photographs “fijados por Lumholtz” —“fixed by Lumholtz”— during an 1890s expedition (II, 65). (“The Norwegian explorer’s camera had the peculiar tendency of snatching beauty from the indians, reducing them to mere ghosts of themselves.”) He worries that ethnographers with tape-recorders and notebooks can similarly behave like bandits, ‘snatching’ materials from indigenous communities that they then transplant to their “libros técnicos” and “gabinetes de trabajo” (“textbooks” and “offices”) (III, 418). “Les robamos,” —“We steal from them,”— Benítez writes at one point, questioning the consequences of taking the materials he has collected back to Mexico City, and criticizing his own, early writings on the Tarahumara for producing a similar effect as Lumholtz’ camera: “Los indios figuran allí como fantasmas,” (I, 65). (“The indios figure there like ghosts. . .”)

While Benítez concedes that this predicament leaves him uneasy with “el documento etnográfico” and caught somewhere between frustrated activist and frustrated documentarian, he also experiments with ways of registering the voices and faces of his sources in the five volumes that make up Los indígenas de México (I, 66). All five volumes come punctuated by portraits and photographs of Benítez’ informants, as well as quotations that Benítez transcribes of their voices on tape. In Tomo I, he writes that his time in Chiapas offered a kind of corrective to his Tarahumara study by way of teaching him to become more attuned to the first-person voices of his sources: “todo lo que yo pudiera decir valía muy poco en comparación a lo que ellos me dijeran sobre su vida,” (“all that I could say was worth very little in comparison with what they might tell me about their lives,”), he writes, and the emphasis on direct citation visible in the Indios de México series suggests one textual strategy

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2 See Analisa Taylor Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination on the INI, México’s principal federal agency for indigenous peoples at the time. The agency was replaced by the Consejo Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI) by President Vicente Fox in 2003.

3 As Blom tells it, she travels to Chiapas because of Soustelle’s México, tierra indígena, which she reads on the boat to the Americas. On the salvage paradigm, see chapter one of this dissertation.

4 I cite passages taken from Los indígenas de México Tomos I-V by indicating the volume number in italics, followed by the page number.

5 All translations in this chapter are my own.
that Benítez uses to manifest the presence of these subjects in his texts (I, 65). To listen to them and recognize them as engaged photographic subjects, he suggests, is to somehow move outside an ethnographic practice that would render them mere ‘fantasmas.’

Inserting himself within debates about ‘speaking about,’ ‘speaking for,’ or ‘giving voice’ to ethnographic subjects, Benítez thus looks to in-text citation as a means of making the ethnographic text more collaborative and multivocal, but he does so while also mobilizing the text as a record in itself; the in-text citations become an extension of the tape-recorder he carries around and a means of registering and storing his sources’ contributions, presumably in their own words. Benítez took harsh criticism, especially from anthropologists, for taking an approach to citation that many reviewers saw as compromising both the texts’ continuity and its ethnographic value. “All too soon, the story thread is broken by the insertion of innumerable folk tales, meticulously recorded and translated to reproduce the exact words of each informant,” one charged, suggesting that Benítez’ commitment to transcribing and quoting from his ‘informants’ sacrificed the structure and interpretive insight that an ethnography is supposed to offer (Madsen & Madsen 541). Benítez uses the ethnographic text too much like a tape-recorder, they infer, quoting his sources too frequently and leaving the direct citations too long.

With these problems of transcription, recording, and reproduction in mind, this chapter looks to explore Benítez’ citation practice as it plays out in Tomo III, specifically in sections that pair Benítez’ ethnographic study of Semana Santa (Holy Week) festivities and Cora shamanism with photographs and quotations that he takes from his audio recordings of voice. If some reviewers argued that the direct citations in Los indios de México overwhelmed Benítez’ authorial voice to the point of jumbling the texts, we can observe Benítez’ continued hand in shaping the way these voices appeared in their alphabetic form. And while we can read citation in this sense as a textual strategy that results in the kind of “domesticated heteroglossia” that James Clifford and others criticize in ethnographers’ attempts to “break up monophonic authority” and experiment with ways of rendering their informants’ voices in text, we can also observe how Los indios de México consistently draws attention to and problematizes citation as a strategy (Predicaments 50). That is, while we can debate the success of Benítez’ citation practice, the citations themselves—alphabetic and photographic alike—prompt us to read the series as laced with the talk and play of voices and “forms of presence” (in Edwards 174).

In-text citation: Recording voice on tape, in text

When Benítez first arrives in Jesús María, the inland town in the western state of Nayarit where he plans to study Cora shamanism and the Semana Santa (Holy Week) festival, he envisions a “paraíso de la etnología” (“ethnological paradise”), rich with “mitos,” “himnos

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6 See Madsen & Madsen’s joint review in The Hispanic American Historical Review. In an earlier review article in the same journal, Gibson makes a related comment about the quotations that fill Tomo I: “The short personal narratives by the Indians . . . make up an important portion of the book [and] exemplify the themes of grinding poverty, political subordination, and helplessness,” but he argues that these contribute to its “unscientific” quality (Gibson 520). In contrast, a reviewer writing in American Anthropologist acknowledges that Benítez deviates from the conventions of descriptive ethnography but calls Tomo I an exceptionally engaging and above all “solid ethnographic document” (Hinton 922).

7 See Clifford’s The Predicament of Culture for a critique of collaborative and dialogical ethnographic experiments (50).
sagrados,” and “rituales” (“myths,” “sacred hymns,” “rituals”) that he aims to record on tape and offer up as a corrective to histories of the Spaniard’s “conquista espiritual” of the Cora (332-33, 291). He describes himself as ‘armed’ with the latest in recording technologies but without an informant: “yo, armado de infinita paciencia, de grabadoras modernas y de algún dinero, no lograba hacerme siquiera de una una fábula infantil,” he writes at the outset of his visit, contrasting the bulky cameras and wax-cylinder phonographs of early twentieth-century researchers with his own, apparently frivolous equipment (333). After Benítez’ host family prohibits him from going alone in search of a shaman to sing for him, they bring him Pilo—Espiridión Altamirano Lucas or “Pilo Tamirano Luca, como él se decía” (“Pilo Tamirano Luca, as he called himself”) (336). Benítez immediately describes his luck as changed. He learns that Pilo knows the “Pachitas”—a body of chants and songs largely missing from the ethnographic record—and he declares Pilo “el chamán ideal” and an ideal source for his research, not least because Pilo speaks Cora, Huichol, and some Spanish (336). Whereas some shamans earn mention in Tomo III for their ability to evade the capture of the researcher’s recording devices, Benítez portrays Pilo as an eager participant, garrulous and animated in the presence of the tape recorder: “Con frecuencia lo veo arrodillado junto a mi mesa recitando en éxtasis una letanía y si se refiere a una ceremonia o a una curación, deja la silla, toma sus bastones emplumados—muveris—, su pipa de barro rojizo, y volviéndose lentamente a los cuatro rumbos cardinales arroja el humo imaginario diciendo: —En el nombre sea de Dios. Dios Penatzi. . .” (338). (“Frequently I see him on his knees by my table reciting in ecstasy a litany, and if it refers to a ceremony or healing, he’ll leave his chair, grab his feathered scepters—muveris—his reddish clay pipe and turning slowly to the four cardinal points, he blows imaginary smoke, saying: In the name be of God. God Penatzi . . .”)

In the sections of Tomo III that focus on Pilo, Benítez’ principal writing mode is citation. Shortly after describing their first meeting, Benítez begins citing Pilo’s first-person voice at length, filling pages with ‘direct’ quotations that he transcribes from the audio recordings they make together. He limits himself to the occasional footnote or brief comment—usually a quick translation or phrase to clarify an object or term that Pilo references in the Cora language—and inserts these in square brackets inside Pilo’s quotation. Nearly one hundred pages of Tomo III are presented like a series of these extended, direct quotations that Benítez transcribes from audio recordings of Pilo’s voice—a move that relocates, at least for a time, Benítez’ voice to marginal spaces on the page—footnotes, brackets. Whereas at other points in Tomo III and the Indios de México series as a whole Benítez’ first-person narration takes charge of guiding readers and filtering the voices of his sources through his own, here Benítez takes an increasingly editorial over authorial role in the text, giving readers ‘direct’ access to Pilo’s words, as if to simulate the experience of listening to him on tape. Pilo’s narration can seem to roam freely about the page in these sections, talking us through autobiographical anecdotes and shamanic ceremonies that he simultaneously explains and performs. When Benítez voice appears, it is barricaded on either side by square brackets or pushed to the footnotes at the very bottom of the page so that it looks like he is interrupting.

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8 Benítez entitles the section that focuses on the Cora Nostalgía del paraíso, and he opens it by rewriting a portion of José Ortega’s 18th-century Maravillosa Reducción y Conquista de la provincia de San Joseph del Gran Nayar. In opening the section this way, Benítez frames his own ethnographic account of the Cora community of Jesús María with a kind of performative re-writing of a historical text describing the supposed ‘conquista’ and Catholic conversion of the ‘last’ Cora prince, Tonati, in 1721.
Of course, the spaces where Benítez positions his voice are sites of their own kind of textual authority, and the brackets and footnotes serve as readily visible cues of his constant hand in shaping what the text presents as unmediated reproductions of Pilo’s voice. That is, even as the text summons citation in a way that shifts the dynamics between the voices of author (Benítez) and source (Pilo), it also positions itself within a crux of problems about recording and reproduction, transcription and citation. Benítez’ first-person account is replaced by Pilo’s words in the form of direct quotations—that is, citations that prioritize precision and reproduction (as opposed to paraphrase, for example). This kind of citation proposes not only to make reference to a source and borrow from it, but also to give readers a sense of direct encounter with that source, at least within the boundaries of the quotation. Although Benítez sometimes employs a dialogue format in parts of *Tomo III*—his interview with the Bishop of Jesús María serves as one example and gets printed like a transcript of the back-and-forth between interviewer and interviewee—in the bulk of the sections dedicated to Pilo, Benítez employs citation in a way that minimizes his presence in the exchanges with the shaman, as well as his role in the process of producing the text. Instead of interview, paraphrase, or a language of ethnographic analysis—all of which appear elsewhere in the volume—his use of direct quotations here suggests an investment in making space in the text for Pilo to tell his own story and to tell it in his own words. Large sections of the quotations that Benítez attributes to Pilo are autobiographical and testimonial: Pilo tells Benítez about courting his first wife, learning to use a gun while hiding in the mountain caves during the Cristero War, and memorizing the repertoire of prayers and songs for healing under the tutelage of local shamans. Starting with the story of how he came to recognize his ability to heal at age eight, Pilo recounts fasts and pilgrimages, rites of passage and other episodes that mark his journey to becoming a healer and earning the position of “el Basta”—the shaman elected by the Cora gobernadores (governors) of Jesús María to conduct official ceremonies and serve as an intercessor for the Cora community. Printing these as quotations and gathering them under the heading “Historia de un chamán cora,” Benítez orders the episodes chronologically and shapes Pilo’s story by organizing it into a ‘history’ of a Cora shaman that chronicles the man’s coming-of-age from young healer to “homo religiosus” (342).

While significant portions of *Tomo III* use citation to reconstruct Pilo’s oral life history, others use it to record Pilo’s voice while he is in the process of performing shamanic ceremonies. Parts of *Tomo III* read like transcripts of the audio recordings that Benítez makes of ceremonies that Pilo conducts in his presence, featuring Pilo’s narration while he is painting, kneeling, dancing, arranging ceremonial objects, smoking, pacing, singing and humming, burning candles, and preparing food offerings—all embodied practices intimated by Pilo’s narration that also gesture toward the oblique, irreproducible elements of the performances, which cannot be rendered fully in text. Left unmarked, many of these recordings appear to have been made in the Casa del Gobernador—the gobernador’s official place of residence and a ceremonial center where the Basta is called to pray for rain, conduct cleansing and healing ceremonies, and lay out offerings of tamales, pinole nuts, and balls of freshly-picked cotton for the gods. Benítez portrays the Casa as a crucial site for his fieldwork and his recording practice, describing it as a place where he is able to produce an invaluable series of recordings of usually-guarded Cora prayers, songs, dialogues, and spiritual practices.

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9 The interview with the Bishop begins on page 315 of *Tomo III*.
10 “El Basta es el rezandero oficial, el encargado de orar por los coras de Jesús María y sus espaldas llevan el peso de los dolores, las esperanzas y los anhelos de la comunidad” (*III*, 310).
For him, the *Casa* seems to represent a kind of theatre in which he is granted the opportunity to *presentar*—a verb he uses throughout the *Indios de México* series to describe the experience of bearing witness to a cultural practice, but also the activity of producing some form of evidence to corroborate that experience, to contribute something to the ethnographic record. There in the *Casa*, his tape recorder and microphone—*aparatos* that often earn explicit mention in the text—serve as crucial instruments for recording Cora voices and capturing the ephemeral performances—an objective he sometimes finds thwarted. When he earns permission to record a prayer ceremony performed at a private meeting held in the *Casa*, Benítez openly recounts one of his clumsy attempts to use these devices to successfully convert voices to tape:

Con el permiso del Gobernador, acerco a su boca el micrófono de la grabadora. Durante 15 larguísimos minutos el Basta, sin pestañear, sin importarle la presencia del aparato, recita su conjuro. Vuelvo después a mi banco y, ya pasada la ceremonia, los Gobernadores se dirigen al intérprete diciéndole que desean escuchar el canto del Basta. Hago retroceder la cinta y la grabadora no emite el menor sonido. Repito la operación con el mismo resultado y entonces me doy cuenta de que en mi prisa la palanca del encendido se había corrido. Inútilmente pedí que me dieran otra oportunidad. Transcurrido el tiempo sagrado, la oración no podía repetirse, y según me explicó después mi intérprete, los coras atribuyeron la mudez de la grabadora no a mi torpeza, ni a una falla mecánica, sino a la voluntad de los dioses, que no permitieron la profanación y borraron el rezo... Los grandes chamanes cuando son fotografiados contra su voluntad, pueden asimismo rodearse de nubes y permanecer invisibles. (313)

With the *Gobernador*'s permission, I place the microphone close to his mouth. For fifteen long minutes, the Basta recites his *conjuro* without even blinking or caring about the presence of the device. I go back to my stool and, once the ceremony is finished, the *Gobernadores* direct their attention to the interpreter, telling him that they wish to hear the Basta’s song. I rewind the tape, and the recorder lets out not even the slightest of sounds. I do it again with the same result and then realize that, in my haste, the on-switch had turned off. To no avail, I asked them for another opportunity. The time of the sacred had run out, and the prayer could not be repeated. As my interpreter explained later, the Coras attributed the recorder’s silence not to my clumsiness or to a mechanical failure, but to the gods, who would not permit the defamation and erased the prayer. ... When the great shamans are photographed against their will, they can similarly shroud themselves in clouds and remain invisible.

Closing this anecdote by implicitly associating the tenuous ability of photography and
audiotapes to capture the Cora chaman in sound or image, Benitez casts doubt on the reliability of the instruments that he uses to create supposed copies of the events that he witnesses in the Casa. We find him struggling with technical difficulties in the field, but also showing the complications behind producing records of voice. Although he sometimes hesitates to mark or reveal them, here he makes rare mention of working through a translator and discloses some of the limitations of the audio-recording technology he relies upon.11 And while he characterizes the anecdote with a tone of faint disregard or amusement—he misses a singular opportunity because he rushes through setting up the recorder and portrays the Cora members of the audience as mistaking his “torpeza” for the will of the gods—the passage also poses key questions about Benitez’ practice: how do we know what made it—or did not make it—onto the tape? And, by extension, how do we know what made or did not make it into the citations that he includes in the text? By foregrounding the activity or practice of recording, shortcomings included, passages like this one complicate questions of reproduction and direct citation, characterizing Benitez’ process of recording voices and subsequently mobilizing transcription to represent ephemeral, aural events in written form as an activity not of replication or direct transfer, but of mediation and chance.

When he starts reproducing ample quotations from his recordings with Pilo, Benitez mobilizes the text as a reproduction of the excerpts of voice that he has already ‘copied’ on tape, employing written language as an extension of the audio recordings he makes with his microphone and tape recorder. While Pilo’s quotations are chosen and ordered, edited and abbreviated, selected and shaped by Benitez, the citations themselves draw attention to both the irrecoverable activity of talk behind the quotes and the traces of Pilo’s voice that run through the text. Much of the texture of Pilo’s voice seems to have been smoothed out in the process of transferring the aural recordings to text: as Benitez reminds us on multiple occasions, Pilo’s Spanish is fairly broken, yet the transcriptions that appear in Tomo III come written into a format of sentences and paragraphs and feature only occasional words in the Cora language. At times, however, marks of orality jump out of the text, reminding us of the voice magnetically written on the audiotapes. The phatic phrase “te voy a decir, amigo,” (“let me tell you, amigo”) introduces an anecdote that Pilo tells about meeting his wife, Angelina de la Cruz, inserting an expression in the text that suggests a level of informality—of spontaneity and ease—in the interactions between Pilo and Benitez, but it also focuses attention on the face-to-face conversation—the talk—that remains in play in the citations that Benitez takes from his recordings (III, 370). Contractions like “Namás” and “pa que” sprinkled throughout the citations similarly retain an oral quality and prompt readers with conversational markers that circle back to the activity of speaking, albeit distanced and mediated (III, 359). The deictics that recur throughout Pilo’s quotations—he is especially fond of “aquí” (“here”), for

11 Throughout Tomo III, Benitez intermittently acknowledges the presence of a translator in these recording sessions, but issues of translation usually emerge obliquely in the text. See, for example, the tension between ‘reproduction’ and translation as mediation when Benitez cites Pilo’s reenactment of the Centurión ceremony. Benitez presents the song lyrics as direct citation but Pilo’s narration makes explicit the fact that he conducts at least parts of it in Cora: “El peyote canta igual que los huicholes, pero canta en cora,” he says, introducing the first song (383). Benitez then cites the song entirely in Spanish. Furthermore, Benitez laments the cumbersome quality of the Spanish translations that he prints of the Cora songs he has on tape, but he often glosses over the work of the interpreters who participated in making them possible. In an interview with Margarita García Flores held at UNAM, Benitez admits that he speaks none of the indigenous languages he has recorded. See Cartas marcadas.
example—also serve as reminders that the citations are lifted from a series of situated, interactive events.¹²

Implicit in the mise-en-scène of fieldwork that Benítez constructs early on in Tomo III is a sense that Pilo shapes the terms and conditions of these recording sessions.¹³ He describes how their interactions play out, mediated by the tape recorder:

Una vez que está solo en el cuarto y puede concentrarse. . . puede cantar horas enteras frente al micrófono de la grabadora sin dar señales de fatiga, a condición de no ser interrumpido. Una pregunta, una aclaración, una visita inoportuna, lo expulsan del tiempo sagrado y lo desconciertan a tal grado que le es imposible retomar el hilo del canto o del relato. El canto tiene que ser dicho entero, y si me cuenta algún episodio de su vida. . . debe también contarla entera a modo de una confesión general y sin omitir ningún detalle. . . Simplemente se dice todo o no se dice. (III, 336)

Once he is alone in the room and able to concentrate. . . he can sing for hours on end in front of the microphone without giving sign of fatigue as long as he is not interrupted. A question, a clarification, an inopportune visit expel him from the time of the sacred and disconnect him to the extent that it becomes impossible to recapture the thread of the story or song. The song has to be told in its entirety, and if he tells me an episode about his life. . . he must tell it in its entirety in a confessionary mode, without omitting any detail. . . Simply put, you say everything or say nothing at all.

As Benítez defines the conditions for a successful recording session, he avoids stating that any of these have been imposed by Pilo. We cannot help but wonder, however, why Pilo seems willing to sing uninhibited and for long stretches of time, filling the researcher’s audio tapes with magnetic recordings of his voice, but only if he is “solo en el cuarto” and allowed to sing “a condición de no ser interrumpido” (III, 336). When Benítez singles out certain types of interruptions—“una pregunta, una aclaración, una visita inoportuna”—saying that they irreparably break the flow of the recording session, he further hints that he risks losing the chance to tape Pilo’s performance should he try to turn it into an interview or investigation. Elsewhere in the series Benítez ponders how his sources exercise the power of selection—that is, they actively chose what to share with him and what to leave unsaid or hide—but here, he suggests that his ability to direct the recording sessions with Pilo is limited, bound by a certain

¹² Questions of voice-on-tape and voice-turned-text have been particularly important in debates surrounding testimonio. See generally the work of John Beverley and The Real Thing, a collection of essays edited by Georg Gugelberger. On the tape-recorded voice and the marks of orality that make it into testimonio transcriptions, see Eliana Rivero’s comments, referenced in John Beverley’s work. She writes of Omar Cabeza’s La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde (translation published in English as Fire from the Mountain) “the act of speaking faithfully recorded on the tape, transcribed and then ‘written’ remains in the testimonio punctuated by a series of interlocutive and conversational markers. . . which constantly put the reader on alert. . .” (in Beverley 97).
¹³ On fieldwork as mise-en-scène see George Marcus’ work, especially Ethnography Through Thick and Thin.
code. Once a performance has begun, it cannot be interrupted, re-directed, or truncated; Pilo insists that the songs and autobiographical anecdotes be “told in their entirety,” avoiding a question-and-answer type of delivery. In this sense, the “pregunta . . . aclaración . . . visita inesperada” that Benítez portrays as threatening Pilo’s ability to maintain his grasp on the ‘thread’ of the performance (“el hilo del canto o del relato”) suggests that Pilo might be less concerned with ‘losing’ the thread than in weaving it his own way.

In one of these performances cited in Tomo III, Pilo conducts a prayer ceremony in the Casa to intercede on behalf of the health of Jesús María residents and their livestock. While creating a ceremonial painting with feathers and copal ink (his narration interpolates these activities), he asks the sun god to protect the community from smallpox, which is rumored to be spreading in the region: “Queremos estar sanos, estar aliviados, los indios mexicanos de Jesús María . . .” (III, 378). These pleas for divine protection take a turn, however, when Pilo shifts his attention from the community’s imminent vulnerability to disease to its ongoing economic vulnerability. Remark ing on the tenuous living conditions of Jesús María families, he portrays a community that, unable to grow enough food to subsist, must turn to low-wage work as migrant laborers in the cash-crop farms of the coast: “Aquí no hay trabajo, está seca la tierra, aquí no sembramos por la seca . . .” Pilo continues, contrasting the bounty of the coast with the lands of the locale but, more importantly, moving to denounce the working conditions faced by the male migrant workers who leave Jesús María (378). The direct appeals to the sun god fall away completely, and Pilo’s focus turns toward recounting the experience of the male “peones”—often in a first-person, testimonial voice. He describes long days harvesting crops like tobacco and beans and foregrounds the tensions between ‘we’ the “peones” and the “patrón,” whom Pilo says barely allows the workers sufficient time to rest and prohibits them from gathering the leftover crops that fall to the ground to take home to their families.

The contrast between the patrón’s position and the worker’s vulnerability becomes increasingly salient in the process of Pilo’s performance—a performance that turns to a language of solidarity and denouncement of the poverty and oppression faced by the Cora community in Jesús María. Portrayed as wasteful and stingy—the patrón orders workers to leave some ears of corn to rot and prefers that beans dropped during the harvest be “abandonados”—the patrón that Pilo depicts lives in a world of power and plenty. In contrast, Pilo suggests that the workers’ wages barely cover the bill when they stop at the market on their return journey home to buy supplies. Reenacting a scene at the marketplace, Pilo talks through a list of what the peones buy that includes items like rice, blankets, clothes, and animal feed, putting into material terms the strain between what “we buy” (“compramos”) and what “we’re paid” (“ganamos”) (379). Here, he narrates in the first-person plural, and when he shows how the bill measures up against the peones’ meager wages, he employs a language of numbers and precision: “Ganamos treinta pesos diarios; 15 por una tarea de treinta pasos cuadrados; y si hacemos cuatro tareas ganamos 60 pesos, pero hay que trabajar de sol a sol y pagar nuestra comida y la comida de los burros y las mulas” (379). Even after the workers start the trip home, carrying the supplies that they have purchased with their earnings, Pilo makes a point of underscoring how their vulnerability persists beyond the workplace or the fields where they harvest. He ends the prayer ceremony—or Benítez cuts it off in the editing process, we cannot know which—by channeling the peones’ hopes that they will not be robbed on the road home, intercepted by “bandidos” (379).

By the time we reach the end of this ceremony in citation, it becomes difficult not to notice the shifts that the prayer ceremony takes, moving from Pilo interceding on behalf of the
community to his reenactment of the peones’ migration from Jesús María to the coast and back again. Seemingly bothered by the shift, Benítez interjects, inserting the longest of only a handful of bracketed comments in what he otherwise presents as direct quotations taken from the audio recordings:

[He reproduced the relato of Pilo because it gives an approximate idea of the way the Basta sings. What starts as a ceremony to conjure illness... moves him to paint their misery and to contrast it with the bounty of the coast where—a surprising fact—they do not harvest all of the ears of corn and even leave beans to waste, beans which the patrón, if he is a ‘friend,’ will let them eat but not take home. The Basta has to fill a significant period of time and perhaps resorts frequently to this type of deviation during the course of the ceremonies conducted in the Governor’s house.] (III, 379)

“Divagaciones”—deviations, digressions—Benítez calls the shifts that Pilo’s ceremony takes, inserting himself in the form of an editorial afterward to Pilo’s performance that shows Benítez caught between citing and editing, that is, between ‘reproducing’ the performance and presiding over its course. His comments suggest a need to justify why he would copy and include—reproduce, as he puts it—a ceremony that he characterizes as going off-track. Pilo is described here as if carried away or caught up in the performance process (“Un conjuro... lo lleva a pintar...”), and Benítez wonders whether his divagaciones might stem from a lack of focus or the need to creatively ‘fill time.’ (“[D]ebi llenar un espacio de tiempo considerable y quizá recurra con frecuencia a esta clase de divagaciones...”)

Benítez reads Pilo’s divagaciones as mostly digressive chatter, but Pilo’s ‘wanderings’ can also be seen to create interstices for other voices to enter the text by way of ethnographic citation, and not only because his divagaciones route the ceremony along paths that deviate from the researcher’s preferred trajectory. Over the course of what appears to be a few minutes, Pilo’s performance moves from a language of prayer for protection against smallpox to a language of queja—of grievance or complaint. When Pilo starts describing the men who work as peones, there is an urgency and concreteness to his account of the migrant workers’ experience and its effects on the Jesús María community. He describes a lack of water and arable land, paints a series of scenes showing what it is like to labor in the fields under the patrón, and recounts the episode when the workers shop for supplies, assessing their wages in terms of the cost of necessities like rice and clothing. We move from the land, to the workplace, to the marketplace as Pilo’s ‘relato’ makes connections between material
conditions and socio-economic ones, elaborating a picture of what prevents the Jesús María community from being ‘sano’—healthy—in a way that encompasses more than the immediate smallpox threat.

During the ceremony, Pilo gives voice to a variety of roles, reenacting dialogues between the peones and the patrón, speaking in the role of Basta as the gobernador’s proxy, and staging a performance that channels and interpolates a host of voices, first-person and third, singular and plural. We are left to imagine how modulations in timbre or rhythm would have marked these different voices in the acoustics of Pilo’s performance, but the shifts embed questions of voice into the ceremony itself, making Pilo’s performance into a movement through and between various vocal registers, and raising questions about who is speaking here, but also how, to whom, for whom, and from where? By staging a range of subject positions in the form of different voices, Pilo’s performance touches on what Arjun Appadurai has written about as a pair of intersecting dilemmas of ethnography: voice and place. Recognizing that ethnographies are the product of conversations and represent written records that channel “the voices of those we encounter in the field,” Appadurai nonetheless tends to assume that most of these voices and conversations come directed toward the ethnographer (16-17). Writing that the ethnographic fieldworker occupies a “privileged locus,” he similarly positions the fieldworker as the privileged listener, as if the dialogues and conversations that make their way into the ethnographic record come principally intended for the fieldworker. He writes in his introduction to an issue of Cultural Anthropology:

> Much fieldwork is organized talk, and the ethnographic text is the... creative imposition of order on the many conversations that lie at the heart of fieldwork. But in fieldwork there is a curious double ventriloquism. While one part of our tradition dictates that we be the transparent medium for the voices of those we encounter in the field, that we speak for the native point of view, it is equally true that we find in what we hear some of what we have been taught to expect by our own training, reading, and cultural backgrounds... it becomes difficult to say who really speaks for whom... How many voices are concealed beneath the generalizations of reported speech in much ethnography? And how many voices clamor beneath the enquiries and interests of the single ethnographer? (17)

The line of questioning Appadurai opens here foregrounds a number of the issues that we have been attending to in Benítez’ work—fieldwork as ‘talk,’ ethnographies as records laced with conversations and interplays of voice, and cited speech as masked and mediated speech. Appadurai seems keen to hear ‘concealed’ voices embedded in ethnographic texts, voices that pile up ‘beneath’ the ethnographer’s, forming a kind of aural substratum. But, in doing so, Appadurai characterizes voices like Pilo’s as ‘clamoring’ beneath the ethnographer’s “imposition of order,”—language that suggests that they are desperate to be heard by an ethnographic audience (fieldworkers, readers of ethnography, us), when they may be articulating a range of simultaneous positionalities, only one of which is informant or source (17).

In the case of the ceremony that Pilo conducts to intercede for the health of Jesús María, we might hear a voice that cries out, but questions of audience—of who is listening or
meant to listen to this ‘clamor’—appear more nuanced, even ambivalent, than Appadurai’s formulation might lead us to think. Pilo’s *divagaciones* not only insert speech or performative ‘talk’ that Benítez fumbles to organize; his sudden need to interject into the direct quotation from Pilo marks this quite clearly. Pilo’s vocal gestures also interpolate a spectrum of speaking positionalities and audiences into the performative event. Talk—even ethnographic ‘talk’—happens within a narrative environment, and as Pilo’s ceremony reminds us, this narrative environment often includes multiple, though perhaps intersecting communities of listeners. Benítez may have us believe that the ceremony is (mainly) an object of ethnographic interest, but he and his tape recorder represent only one set of witnesses who attend Pilo’s performance. And the in-text citation suggests that they hardly represent the principal set. Cues in Pilo’s narration place the ceremony in the home of the *gobernador* and within a sequence of official ceremonies that Benítez records, immediately inferring the presence of other listeners who bear witness to and participate in the performance. At one point, Pilo also explicitly enlists the *gobernador*’s participation, asking him to choose the feather to be used in the ceremony. Although some of the other performances that Benítez cites in *Tomo III* are taken from recordings of ceremonies and reenactments that Pilo stages specifically for Benítez to record, these elements in the citation block us from reading this particular ceremony as ‘talk’ indicated for the ethnographer’s ear. The context and jussive address to the *gobernador* further infer that Pilo performs the ceremony in Cora, a language that Benítez elsewhere admits that he does not speak or understand without the help of a translator. This makes Benítez’ ability to access the ‘talk’ of Pilo’s performance thus seem tenuous; it also shows us a fieldworker who, more than orchestrate or oversee the speech and conversations of fieldwork, often finds himself eavesdropping or listening in.  

Rethinking Pilo’s performance as talk not bound by the ethnographic frame allows us to better observe traces of Pilo’s voice—and the traces of other voices and sources—that get magnetically stored on Benítez’ tapes, then registered in the *Indios de México* manuscript in the form of citations. The written ‘record’ of Pilo’s performance resonates with echoes of voice, reverberations of speech events that work in a mode similar to what José Rabasa has called *echografías de voz*—written resoundings of oral performances that, while altered and mediated in the process of their move to “el registro alfabético” “no dejaría[n] por eso ser testimonio de un acto de habla” (125). If the citations in *Los indios de México* come to us in admittedly less ‘direct’ form than we might suppose, then the ones we have been contemplating also resonate with multiple voices that speak about the ‘health’ of the Jesús María community. In a way, Pilo’s ceremony as it reads in *Tomo III*, itself works via layers of citation, interpolating a spectrum of different voices and perspectives within “un mismo espacio verbal” and acting out “multiples posicionamientos” through the vocals of one, lead performer (Rabasa 115). Pilo frequently shifts between first-person and third in the course of the ceremony, and he interprets a host of different voices and registers—he moves through prayer, story-telling, and dialogue, and literally ‘gives voice’ to the *peonos* when enacting an exchange between them and

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14 See also chapter three, where I bring out a similar reading while engaging a scene in Darcy Ribeiro’s novel *Maira*. These glimpses of the fieldworker as eavesdropping or listening in, I hope to suggest in both cases, draw attention to the moments of unpredictability and ordinariness in fieldwork that can help us read against it as neatly ‘organized’ practice.

15 Rabasa builds on Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler’s use of the term in *Echographies of Television*, extending their discussion of the mediated events of ‘live’ television to think about Nahua performances as they were rendered in alphabetic and pictorial texts in colonial Mexico. See “Ecografías de la voz en la historiografía nahua.”
their patron, for example—all of which suggest that the performance functions as a venue for transmitting the echoes of voices and testimonies that converge in a nexus of themes about migration and labor, poverty and hunger in Jesús María.

Like the variations in verb tense characteristic of the syntax of Pilo’s quotations in Tomo III, these frequent shifts in voice and register—the moves from first-person “we” to third-person “they,” for example—bring out features of Pilo’s performance that Benítez could have chosen to ‘correct’ for in the text, treating them like irregularities to be smoothed out in the process of converting the audiotaped voice into writing. But these movements through various voices and registers also require that audiences listen to the same ceremony several ways. That is, the movements and multiplicities of voice that we can hear in Pilo’s performance continually reposition audiences, demanding that they listen across registers—prayer, dialogue, testimonial account, anecdote—and across different ways of speaking about the ‘health’ of the Jesús María community. If in Mário de Andrade’s O turista aprendiz, we saw Mário explore listening as a practice of attuning the self to voices and notes outside of the familiar or readily identifiable, here we can consider Pilo’s performance as demanding a mode of listening that is highly dynamic and multifaceted.16

Pilo’s divagaciones, in particular, demand that we give close attention to a range of alternating voices and registers, producing an affect similar to what James Clifford has described as “shifting modes of attention” (Looking 11). Multivocality, Clifford proposes, puts audiences in contact with multiple, often dissonant voices and perspectives—a move acutely relevant for reconfiguring the power relations enmeshed into ethnographic work because it destabilizes ethnographers’ claims to exclusive authorship. But multivocality also shapes modes of listening, Clifford shows, requiring a particular kind of listening agility. Discussing the museum catalogue Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People, he elaborates multivocality as a strategy for ‘making space’ for voices that could otherwise be hard to hear over researchers’ talk. He describes the catalogue like a collage of fragments of voice: “No one holds the floor for very long, and the experience of reading is one of constantly shifting modes of attention, encountering specific rhetorics, voices, images, and stories, and shuttling between the archeological past, personal memories, and present projects” (11). The catalogue’s significance for Clifford lies, at least in part, in the way that this multiplicity of voices produces internal conversations and inconsistencies, involving voices in a swirl of interplay that prompts audiences to attend to try to hear voices that are constantly on the move.

Clifford’s reading of the value of the “shifting” and “shuttling” that takes place in the Looking Both Ways catalogue stays largely with multivocality’s impact for an anthropologically-minded readership, and he references the catalogue as a representative example of changing relations between researchers and local communities manifest, in part, through a changing approach to voice and citation. In some ways, we might say that Benítez employs quotations in an attempt to turn his ethnographic texts into something closer to the kind of collaborative space that Clifford locates in the museum catalogue, allowing the voices of his sources to fill entire sections, converse with one another, and speak—or at least appear to speak—directly and independently of him. Pilo’s performances, however, push us to look within the citations themselves for voices that play in the text; that is, they prompt us to listen for the soundtrack of unorganized or unexpected ‘talk’ that moves in and through the ethnographic text via

16 See chapter two for an extended reading of ethnographic practice as a listening practice in Andrade’s O turista aprendiz.
citation. In the case of the prayer ceremony that Pilo conducts in the home of the Gobernador, we have a prime example of an ethnographic citation that brings the ethnographer-source dynamic into crisis: the in-text citation of the ceremony, coupled with Benítez’ subsequent commentary, puts the voices of source and ethnographer directly up against one another, in this case creating an audible dissonance between the nuances of Pilo’s performance and Benítez’ interpretation. Pilo’s performance clearly moves in directions that Benítez wishes it would not go—a gesture we could read as resisting or frustrating Benítez’ ethnographic authority and intentions. The ‘wanderings’ that the ceremony takes, however, also seem to ‘make space’ for a play of voices, circulating them within multiple listening communities or systems of meaning at once. Voices of testimony and protest are audible in Pilo’s ‘divagaciones,’ for example, as he blends interceding with interpreting a spectrum of social roles—Gobernador, Bauta, peones, patrón—in a ceremony that can be read as acting out a conversation about labor and exploitation affecting the Jesús María community.

Taken within the context of the Gobernador’s home—the place where Cora representatives meet to discuss and decide issues facing the community—Pilo’s divagaciones could be read as circulating voices of queja within a political space. When Pilo gives a first-person account of harvesting in the fields or visiting the marketplace, he fuses anecdotal and testimonial narrative, taking up voices of collective experience and tracing the performance with statements that suggest the importance of bearing witness: “aquí no sembramos por la seca,” “ganamos treinta pesos diarios,” “hay que trabajar de sol a sol y pagar nuestra comida” (III, 378-9). Phrases like these suggest an urgency to convey or communicate a set of problems about a shared, socio-economic reality. Even in citation, the play of voices in the ceremony invites a range of overlapping readings. We can read the ceremony as a report on the ‘health’ of the Jesús María community extending from Pilo’s role as healer and intercessor, an appeal meant to shape the way the Cora representatives govern, or a space of personal testimony or opportunity to voice shared injustice. Attending to play thus helps us not only complicate the sense that the ethnographer functions as an enabler or ‘giver’ of voice, unlocking us from a reading of the ethnographic event as a contest to speak; it also requires us to listen for the multiplicities and movements of voice, the “shifting” and “shuttling” across “rhetorics, voices. . . and stories” to return to Clifford, that convey the multifaceted quality of a performance like Pilo’s, even as it gets cited and circulated as ethnographic source material (11).

Transferred from oral performance, to audiotape, to text, Pilo’s voice continues to play and be played through different technologies and modes long after the recording event. We might imagine how, inevitably, the recordings of Pilo’s voice had to be replayed over and over in the process of producing the Tomo III manuscript, perhaps studied by translators, revisited by Benítez on the bus or plane home, listened to in his home or office. But the citations also work to haunt the text with echoes, playing voices even after the text shifts away from citation to return to Benítez’ first-person narrative and a language of ethnographic account. After quoting scores of Pilo’s autobiographical anecdotes, chants, and shamanic ceremonies, Benítez breaks in to outline the research on a particular myth that Pilo references, including Benítez’ own failed attempts to record it. Pilo disappears for a time as Benítez compares Huichol and Cora versions of the myth, summarizes the conclusions of two ethnographers who pieced

17 On play and the portability of voices, see Rey Chow’s essay “Listening Otherwise.” Focusing on popular music from Hong Kong, Chow suggests that listening otherwise can involve tracing the movements of sound and voice without necessarily assuming a speaking subject.
together varying, incomplete versions, and recounts—with palpable frustration—his inability to secure a recording himself. The many “cantadores” and “informantes” (“singers” and “informants”) he interviewed were eager to share the myth’s moral, “pero guardaron silencio acerca del mito,” (“but they kept silent about the myth”) Benítez tells us, admitting that his failure to tape an oral version had mistakenly led him to believe that “éste se había extinguido” (“this one had disappeared”) (III, 406).

After nearly one hundred pages of citations, Benítez moves away from quoting Pilo, but reminders of the shaman’s voice resound and resurface throughout the pages that follow. “Pilo me contó que. . .”, Benítez writes when introducing a tale of divine punishment, drawing attention to the second-hand nature of the story he transcribes (III, 407). As the text continues, it becomes difficult not to hear the second-hand quality behind the materials Benítez presents. Many go unattributed but carry marks of Pilo’s diction and style, while others tie back somehow to the shaman, even if Benítez does not collect them directly from Pilo. At one point, Benítez dedicates a sub-section to reconstructing a healing ceremony that Pilo had conducted in the home of Aurelio Kánare, the local schoolteacher whom Benítez refers to as his “primer aliado” in Jesús María (III, 333). Benítez was not called to witness the ceremony—as we learn elsewhere, much to Benítez’ dismay, Pilo tends to exclude him from attending the healing ceremonies that he performed in private homes. Benítez nonetheless records and transcribes the account that Kánare gives him of the ceremony, piecing together Kánare’s recollections in a way that attempts to recreate Pilo’s narration and actions, step-by-step.

The sense that Pilo’s voice haunts the text even after the direct quotations fade becomes more acute when we learn that Pilo has died: “ya cuando estaba casi terminado este libro, el profesor Salomón Nahmad, director del Centro Cora-Huichol, me dijo que Pilo había muerto y que los funcionarios de Jesús María atribuían su fallecimiento al hecho culpable de haber tracionado sus secretos religiosos” (“when this book was nearly finished, Professor Salomón Nahmad, director of the Cora-Huichol Research Center, told me that Pilo had died and that the officials of Jesús María blamed his death to the fact that he had betrayed his religious secrets”) (III, 416). In the pages that follow, Benítez runs frantically through various scenarios to try to explain what may have caused Pilo’s death: his frequent exposure to illness due to his role as a healer? Punishment from the gods for his role as Benítez’ informant? Punctuating these scenarios are moments when Benítez implicates himself in the shaman’s death. He describes Pilo in terms of an ethnographic source turned victim and ethnographic recording as pillage, condemning his own “afán por agotar una mina de valiosas informaciones” (“eagerness to exhaust a mine of rich information”) (418). Then he ends the section with a disquieting break: “Detrás de cada libro puede estar el cadáver de un indio traidor como Pilo,” (“Behind each book might be the corpse of an Indian-traitor like Pilo”) he writes, calling the ethnographic text—including the book we hold in our hands—a graveyard haunted by the sources who may have given their lives to transfer their knowledge to the ethnographer’s tapes and text (418).

Is citing a form of stealing, that is, an extractive practice, an appropriative gesture? Is ethnographic recording a kind of banditry? A murderous activity? Benítez leaves us with an unanswered line of questioning about the ethics of recording voices that extends into the ethics of ethnographic listening and reading. At this point, Pilo seemingly disappears from the text once more. When Pilo suddenly, momentarily, re-emerges some pages later, it happens in the midst of Benítez’ description of a ceremony to confirm a newly elected Gobernador: “Allí—informa Pilo—siguen bebiendo y fumando. . .” (“Right there—Pilo informs—they continue
drinking and smoking . . .”) (III, 422). Much like the photograph that Walter Benjamin describes, the in-text citation can evoke the voice of the dead, excerpting and recalling an audio-recorded voice in the way of a “posthumous shock” (in Cadava 102).

Photographs as Citations: Recording the Semana Santa

Unlike many of the shamans, sources, and interviewees quoted throughout Las Indios de México, Pilo is noticeably absent as a named subject from the album of photographs tucked into the end of Tomo III.18 Much like the way that Pilo’s voice continues to haunt the volume even after the direct citations fall away, it also haunts the photographic record of the Cora Semana Santa festival included in Tomo III. Taken by Héctor García, the photographer who collaborates with Benítez to produce the documentary film Semana Santa entre los cora (1971), the Semana Santa images often obliquely cite Pilo’s narration, picturing snapshots from performances and practices that Pilo has described only pages earlier. García’s photographs also cite and converse with Benítez’ written account of the festival that they attend together in Spring 1969. The album of over sixty images follows a similar sequence as Benítez’ day-by-day, journal-like account of the celebration that blends Cora and Catholic practices in a weeklong pageant depicting the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. García starts the album with a set of establishing frames: a photograph of a woman cupping a bowl of burning incense and walking in the procession that announces the impending death of Cristo-Sol (Christ-Sun), an image of peyote-cactus used in certain Semana ceremonies, and a glimpse inside a room where two long-haired girls play on a petate-mat, surrounded by the stacked piles of gourds, bananas, and other foods left by families to feed the sizable pageant cast throughout the week.

The miniature album of photographs then shifts focus to the troupe of young men at the center of the festival. Some convert themselves into white-clad “centuriones” who hunt for Cristo-Sol, while others take on the roles of “judíos,” ‘demons’ who are said to borrarse— to erase themselves— more and more as the festival moves on. They cover their bodies with thick, chalky stripes of paint that they prepare from the ashes of burnt corncobs, wear animal masks made of paper máchê, and parade about the town dancing and acting out the evil released by the god’s death. A few photos break away to show Holy Week rituals taking place in the town’s Catholic church or to give ‘behind-the-scenes’ shots of groups of women patting tortillas or stirring beans in large pots as they cook for festival participants. But García’s photographic account pays greatest attention to the troupe of young judíos and the many physical transformations they undertake. Early in the week, he pictures them filing through the town dressed all in white and carrying swords. Then we catch glimpses of them participating in communal dances, bathing and painting themselves with the stripes and masks that mark them as ‘demons,’ and gathering in the plaza to put on carnivalesque shows of mock battles and acrobatics. García ends the series of images with stills of the judíos washing themselves in the river, chatting and splashing as their stripes dissolve and their masks and props wash away in the current.

We can observe numerous parallels between the practices and technologies that Benítez and García employ to produce their respective accounts of the Semana Santa. In Benítez’ case, the audio recorder stores voices and sounds on spools of magnetized tape, and

18 See, for example, photographs of María Sabina in Tomo III, and images of Pedro de Haro, Agustín de la Cruz, and Bartolo Chibarras in Tomo II.
García’s camera records “escritura con luz,” (“writings with light”), as García was fond of calling photographic images. In this sense, both the audio recorder and camera record traces—aural, visual—onto a physical surface, recalling what Eduardo Cadava writes about as “instrument[s] of citation” (43). Writing in his book-length rumination on Walter Benjamin’s concepts of history and photography, _Words of Light_, Cadava describes the photographic process as one that cites an event by way of interruption and arrest. Thinking about photographs as objects “where replication and production tend to merge,” he suggests that the camera’s relationship to the scenes and subjects it records on film is citational: the camera ‘cites’ a moment in time by way of retaining the imprints or traces of whatever appears in the viewfinder—an act which suspends or “fix[es] an event for an unlimited period of time” in a rapid flash that Benjamin likens to a flash of lightening (Cadava 45, 102). But, in doing so, the camera also intervenes in time, “seizing and tearing an image from its context” (Cadava xx). In Cadava’s reading, this ‘arresting’ event interrupts and immobilizes the flow of time, while it simultaneously retains and “opens up” what he describes as the “radical temporality” of the photographic image (61). Returning repeatedly to Benjamin’s comment that “an image is dialectics at a standstill,” Cadava figures photographs as inscriptions of the past that survive in the present, “funerary moment[s]” that grant those inscriptions an afterlife (64, 10). The photograph, Cadava suggests, thus carries within it a kind of futurity: “By retaining the traces of past and future. . . the photograph sustains the presence of movement, the pulses whose rhythm marks the afterlife. . .” (60).

Cadava’s language of pulses and movement—of concurrent life and death, rhythm and standstill—represents a departure from Roger Bartra’s denouncement of photographs’ tendency to ‘fix’ and ‘arrest’ indigenous subjects that we saw in chapter one. But it also brings out a tension that runs through Héctor García’s _Semana Santa_ photographs of Cora performers suspended in movement. If to think about photography’s “citational character,” as Cadava calls it, is to think about what is “sealed. . . within movement,” then questions of citation become all the more salient when we try to read the _Semana Santa_ photographs—images that were taken specifically to record and ‘fix’ scenes of Cora subjects engaged in dynamic, live performance (xvii). García himself often talked about his photographic practice as one dictated by movement. More than orchestrate or organize—we might recall Appadurai’s comments about ethnographic ‘talk’ as organized ‘talk’ here—García described himself as a _fotoperiodista_ (photojournalist) subject to the swirl of happenings that surround him: “Mis fotografías nacen siempre en medio de un acontecimiento,” (“My photographs are always born in the midst of a happening,”) he took pains to remind audiences when the _Museo de Arte Moderno en México_ decided to put together a touring exhibit of his work, “pues no son

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19 See, for example, his column “La fotografía, bien universal del hombre,” reprinted in the _Chiles verdes_ collection. The short piece takes an interesting turn from declaring photography a universal medium (as opposed to a French invention) to suggesting that it has a particular connection to Mexico: “Los aztecas también tenemos nuestro mes de la forografía” (_Chiles verdes_ 107).
20 See chapter one for an extended reading of Bartra’s critique, which relies heavily on taxidermy metaphors to describe photography’s impact on Mexican indigenous subjects. If for Bartra, the photograph represents a prison that holds and empties photographic subjects of their interiority, Cadava’s reading of Benjamin suggests a sense that life gets somehow sustained in the photograph, albeit in a kind of ‘gorgonized’ form (Cadava 60).
21 See John Mraz’ extensive work on _fotoperiodismo_ in Mexico, especially his studies of photographer Nacho López in _Nacho López y el fotoperiodismo mexicano en los años cincuenta_. On the importance of the documentary approach that García brought to photographing the streets of Mexico City, see Jesse Lerner’s “The Proletarian Camera: Héctor García and the Reconfiguring of the Mexican Street” in _Ghosts of the Revolution in Mexican Literature and Visual Culture_.

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obras de creación más de las cuales yo soy total y absolutamente responsable sino que son actos que tienen su propia vida” (Héctor García 187). (“[T]hey are not creations that belong to me, [creations] of which I am totally and absolutely responsible, but acts that have a life of their own.”) Positioning himself against the studio art tradition he identified with figures like Edward Weston, whom García often described as spending hours shut up in his studio “retocando sus retratos” (“retouching portraits”) as if to ‘correct’ the images and faces of his subjects, García talked about photography as a game of timing. He was known for shooting without filters or artificial lighting—a propensity for the fotoperiodista style especially visible in the night-shots in the Semana Santa series, which show the plaza and streets of Jesús María like a stage riddled with dark, secret spaces that the camera cannot see into.

Taken in the midst of a weeklong sequence of parades, dances, and ceremonies, García’s Semana Santa images give us the sense of a photographer who is surrounded by action and movement, one who seeks less to intervene in the festival than to document it with the camera. The album of photographs in Tomo III favors shots that insert us in the unfolding action of the fiestas, as if the camera were able to reproduce a sense of ‘being there.’ Where Benítez uses citation to give readers a sense of unmediated (or barely mediated) contact with the voice of Pilo, presenting the direct quotations as if they could textually convey the experience of listening to the shaman’s voice, García employs the camera to a similar effect. The images seem aimed to record stills of ‘live’ scenes on film, giving the viewer a sense of unmediated glances into the Semana Santa proceedings. One shot shows the procession of the Centurión Blanco (the White Centurion), whose role in the pageant is to search for Cristo-Sol and eventually oversee his arrest and crucifixion. The Centurión rides his horse along a dirt road at night, surrounded by his ‘soldiers’, when García stands to one side of the road to capture a profile shot of the troupe as it passes by. The blurriness of the night-shot and uneven lighting make the photograph mimic the challenges the human eye would face when trying to view the scene. Similarly, many photographs of the dancing scenes come swirling with clouds of dust kicked up by the performers’ feet, and photos of the judea by the river show mid-air splashes of water or ripples sent off by swimming bodies. The series of images suggest a photographer surrounded by movement and embedded in a whirl of ongoing activities, implying that the shots are spontaneous, ‘real-time’ recordings that capture subjects engaged in activity rather than posing for the photographer.

By converting live performance into what looks like photographic freeze-frames, García’s photographs position themselves on the limits of photography’s arresting function and its ability to “sustain[ ] the presence of movement, the pulses…” (60). Indeed, the bodies that García’s camera immobilizes are ‘fixed’ in a range of lively postures and positions. Images of the judea in particular highlight movement and process as the men perform songs,

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22 Elena Pontiatowska describes a stark contrast between Weston and García’s photographic aesthetic: “si Weston recurrió al lapiz corrector y a las sombras piedosas, Héctor García mete el cuchillo y sin más tiende el paquete de fotografías: ‘Aquí tiene sus fotos, éstas son. Y no hay de otra’” (in Héctor García 190.) Weston spent time in Mexico in the 1920s and is credited among Manuel Álvarez Bravo’s most important mentors. Bravo, in turn, mentored García at the Academia de Arte Cinematográfico in the 1940s. For one reading of Weston’s impact on Mexican photography, see the “Cameras” chapter in Ruben Gallo’s Mexican Modernity.

23 On the ‘artifactuality’ of ‘live’ events and ‘real-time’ recordings see Jacques Derrida & Bernard Stiegler’s Echographies of Television. “[T]he ‘live’ and ‘real time’ are never pure… they do not give us intuition or transparency, a perception stripped of interpretation or technical intervention” (5).

24 See Clifford Geertz’ Works and Lives on the ways ethnographers work to produce a sense of ‘being there’ when composing their textual accounts of fieldwork experience. Geertz focuses on written ethnographies exclusively.

dances, vignettes, and mock battles throughout the town in a kind of carnivalesque abandon. One image shows almost a dozen young men bursting across the frame, sprinting along a dirt path as the white, paper streamers attached to their hats jump and pull behind them. When other performers gather by the riverside to ‘erase themselves’ with body paint and animal masks, García’s camera ‘seizes’ a whole series of moments that look like rapid excerpts from a rolling action sequence. Printed in *Tomo III* in black-and-white—only a handful of images appear in color—a trio of photographs work like visual quotations from a process that undoubtedly required hours; we see the performers engaged in stripping off their white clothes and painting each other with the striped patterns characteristic of the *judea*. One group perches atop a huge boulder on the shore and fills the photographic frame with references to gestures and movements that the camera ‘seizes’: Fingers laden with paint draw across the bare legs and torsos of fellow performers, encoding them with systems of lines and circles that indicate the performer’s rank. Some faces express intensity, concentration, while in others there are signs of laughter and a sense of ease. One adolescent boy stands facing the camera, flanked on either side by companions who line his legs with bold, horizontal stripes. He looks directly into García’s lens and flashes a generous smile. Later, when García photographs the performances staged by the fully costumed *judea*, the frames spill over with painted, masked bodies in movement. The camera ‘arrests’ them while they are in the process of parading through the streets of Jesús María, clownishly acting out battles for spectators, pretending to copulate in front of the gates to the church, or crouching low to the ground as they dance in a circle formation.

Cited by the camera, the bodies of these performers bring a variety of poses and postures into play in the ethnographic record. Where Benítez converts audi-taped voices into in-text citations, inviting us to think about the voices that echo and play in the alphabetic text, García’s images ask us to think about the traces of pose in the photographs—the inflections of subjects’ bodily postures and presences registered on film. Writing about pose in visual anthropology, Elizabeth Edwards has explored a way of reading “the multivalency of photographs and the histories inscribed within them” by drawing focus to the bodies of photographed subjects and the postures they enact in fieldworkers’ photographs (178). Tracing anthropologists’ uneasy relationship with questions of whether or not to pose subjects for the camera and the impact posing has on a photograph’s value as anthropological evidence, Edwards ties pose to debates about the agency of photographed subjects, anthropological authority, and photography’s ‘truth effect.’ In particular, she shows that photographers in the field tend to construct a set of parameters for their approach to posing, while often minimizing the interventions they make when they pay subjects for permission to photograph them, ask a woman to delay bathing her baby until the light improves, or plan for subjects to reenact a musical or dance performance intentionally for the camera.25 For Edwards, therefore, studying the discourse and practice of pose counters the apparent transparency of photographs as anthropological data since “pose constituted a way of controlling photographic excess by arranging data and focusing attention” (168). But her approach to reading images also draws attention to the ways that the bodies of photographed subjects contribute to what she calls the “density” and “excess” of photographic inscription (167, 179). Even ‘posed’ photographs in which an anthropologist-photographer exercises what we might think of as a heightened or explicit level of control over the subjects pictured

25 These examples come from Edwards’ “Tracing Photography,” in which she gives particular attention to images by Margaret Mead & Gregory Bateson, Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and E.H. Man, among others.
ultimately reflect other relations—kin relations, for example—rather than “an order imposed by the photographer,” she argues (179). Although her reading stays largely with the “destabilizing potential of the pose” in terms of how it undercuts “a scientific framework,” she also suggests that pose functions to elicit the “irreducible presence[s]” that photographed bodies inscribe on film (164, in Edwards 178).

Teeming with bodies that stretch and dance and crouch and splash, Héctor García’s Semana Santa series suggests an interesting counterpoint to the tradition of ‘pose’ in anthropology that Edwards traces. Indeed, García’s photographic aesthetic seems to draw attention to what the photographer cannot pose. The patchy lighting available on site, the near impossibility of orchestrating scenes involving dozens of subjects absorbed in activity, the way the photos draw our eye to the spontaneity and the movements of the Cora performers—all these elements of the series seem to draw attention to the dynamism and unpredictability of the field. We can of course debate how illusory this non-interventionist frame may be with Edwards’ arguments in mind, especially the way she problematizes the sense of “immediacy, spontaneity, and naturalism” that photographs can be used to communicate when they are evoked as visual proxies for fieldwork experience (162). In García’s series, however, reading for pose seems to bring out a series of moments when Cora subjects ‘destabilize’ even the possibility for the photographer to imagine ‘ordering’ the scene and the bodies within it. The images García chooses to include in Tomo III seem to foreground this. He appears unwilling to edit out images in which Semana performers look directly into the camera, for example, choosing to show his subjects adopting a variety of postures in relationship to the camera. In fact, most of the photographs in the series feature at least one set of eyes looking back at García or a subject whose body seems poised to engage the camera. In some cases, these photographs register glances and expressions that convey a kind of welcome, as in the image of the adolescent standing naked and half-painted on the shore who meets García’s camera with a smile, or another photograph of two judeás bathing in the river on the final day of the festival; their faces are covered with masks, blocking our view of their gaze, but they face the camera directly, clasp hands, and stretch out their arms in a celebratory gesture.

Other times, engagements with the camera appear more sudden or random, as if the subjects happened to glance at the camera or strike a pose just in time for it to be fixed on the negative. In the shot of white-clad performers standing in a line, most of the subjects appear unaware of the camera, but two of them lean slightly forward, turn their faces toward the camera, and glare into García’s lens. In another, a performer rests against a brick wall on the edge of a crowd of spectators. His face and body are coated with paint, and he rests the point of a sword on the ground in front of him—hints that he is a member of the judea who is taking a break or perhaps waiting for his cue to rejoin the performance taking place. Everyone else in the photograph seems to have their attention fixed on what is happening outside of the photographic frame, but this subject looks intensely at García and/or his camera, purses his lips, and pushes his side against the wall in a tense, guarded pose.

While these examples suggest subjects posing defiantly in the face of the camera, the dancing shots in the series show subjects who appear to pose as if it were not there. Full of

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26 Edwards references a photograph from the 1880s of Aboriginal subjects that was taken for promotional purposes and posed by the photographer. Following Roslyn Poignant, she argues that the image ends up reflecting the intricate kin relations between the subjects in the group, rather than a social organization imposed by the photographer.

27 This photograph became one of the most recognizable and reprinted images from the series. It appears in Tomo III, as well as Escribir con Luz and Héctor García.
masked, painted figures and bodies on the move, these photographs block our access to the performers’ faces, making their bodily poses the focal point of the images. There are frames that contain so many striped, dancing bodies that it becomes difficult to make out any kind of background or distinguish one figure from the next, photographs that highlight feet pounding into the dust or bodies gathering together in a circle that overtakes the plaza. Coming to us in the form of photographic citations, the poses that these bodies strike remind us of the irrecoverable moments that these images ‘seize,’ as well as the immobilized action that García’s camera has ‘torn’ out of time and context by taking the photographs, to think back to Cadava’s vocabulary. The dancers are arrested, caught in the “funerary moment” of the photographs’ making; their poses and movements are fixed, immobilized on film (Cadava 10). And yet the camera that fixes them also cites their bodies in movement, producing photographs that retain a kind of “petrified restlessness,” and jolting them with what Benjamin describes as the camera’s “posthumous shock” (Cadava xx, 102): “Of the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the ‘snapping’ of the photographer has had the greatest consequences,” Benjamin describes, “A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock” (in Cadava 102). In citing the Cora dancers, Garcia’s camera works in a mode of violent interruption, shocking them into the photographic record and recalling their movements and gestures with a technology that fixes them. Yet with the click of a finger, García’s camera also fills the photographic frame with the dancers’ traces, inscribing postures and positions and giving them a posthumous presence in the ethnographic record, even if they were not necessarily intended for it.

Afterlife and the Ethnographic Citation

García’s album of Semana Santa photographs occupies a curious position within the structure of Tomo III; it arrives at a point where the text’s two principal modes of citation—quotation and photography—meet. The grouping of sixty-plus images comes tucked in between Benítez’ journal-like observations of the Semana Santa and an appendix to Tomo III labeled “Mitos, cuentos y leyendas” (“Myths, stories, and legends”) —a collection of oral narratives that Benítez excerpts from the tape recordings that he makes in Jesús María with sources including Pilo, the schoolteacher and translator Aurelio Kánare, and others. He gives every narrative a title—“Cómo el Tlacuache pudo robarse el fuego,” “El Pájaro Flojo y la Iguana,” “El nacimiento del Tabaco” (“How the Tlacuache could steal fire for himself,” “The Lazy Bird and the Iguana,” “The birth of Tabaco”) —and connects each one to a particular narrator, inserting the name of the person who relayed the story in parenthesis at the end of each one. The stories come ripped out of context, organized into a kind of addendum to the text that recalls moments of past narration, instances of talk turned text.

We can see García’s photographs as similar instances of rupture and disassociation, images that reference and cite moments of past performance with the camera. Positioned after Benítez’ description but before the appendix of “Mitos, cuentos y leyendas,” the album of images recalls Benítez’ account of the Semana Santa, but the album’s very position within the structure of the text produces a jostling temporal effect. By appearing as a block of photographs that follows Benítez’ ethnographic description, the photographs seem to take us back in time, forcing us to return to the sequence of rituals and ceremonies that Benítez details in a way that already elicits a sense of distance and disruption. At the same time that the photographs produce this effect of harkening back, the images reference and recall the
bodies and movements of the Cora performers, ripping their portraits out of time. Working as citations, the images ‘seize’ and ‘sustain’ the flashes of time when someone threw the camera a defiant glance, danced a ceremony, or burst across the photographic frame running. In this way, the Semana photographs announce these poses as past but they also cite them.

Benítez and García take up different citation practices that rely on different technologies and forms of mediation: Benítez’ practice employs in-text citations like echoes of voice, transcribing the voices that he first records on audio-tape into quotations that he then uses to fill his text, whereas García takes up the camera as an “instrument of citation” to produce his “escritura con luz.” While these modes imply varying forms of inscription, (re)production, and mediation, they also work to lace the ethnographic record with citations—with quotations both direct and indirect, with photographic images—that reference and recall the voices, bodies, and movements that make their way in. A photograph that García takes of Benítez interviewing in the field during the Semana Santa festivities serves like a reminder of one of the many irrecoverable encounters that went into the making of Los indios de México. We see Benítez standing and facing a masked member of the judea, apparently engaging the man in conversation at a night-time performance. Benítez holds a carton in his hand and a fresh cigarette in his teeth; the judea performer holds his own unlit cigarette loosely between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, suggesting that Benítez has just shared one with him. Yet the performer’s ambiguous pose is the focal point of the image. With his sword draped from a string attached to his wrist, the man holds his right palm up flat and in front of his mask, throwing it up between Benítez’ face and the angular deer mask that covers his own. Héctor García captures the image in profile so that the men’s figures look like two vertical lines separated by a gap of darkness and a flat palm that intervenes in the space between them. Is this a demonstrative gesture? A comical one? A gesture of ethnographic refusal? Benítez does not write about the exchange in his account of the Semana festival, and the caption tells us little: it reads simply “Fernando Benítez entrevista a un ‘judío’”—Fernando Benítez interviews a ‘judío.’” And yet the encounter—an encounter between Benítez and interviewee, between García and the scene—remains cited in the ethnographic record, acquiring a kind of afterlife.
Works Cited


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